

THE Atlantic

MAY 2007

HOW TO **BREAK** A **TERRORIST**

THE INTERROGATIONS THAT BROUGHT DOWN IRAQ'S TOP INSURGENT

by **MARK BOWDEN**

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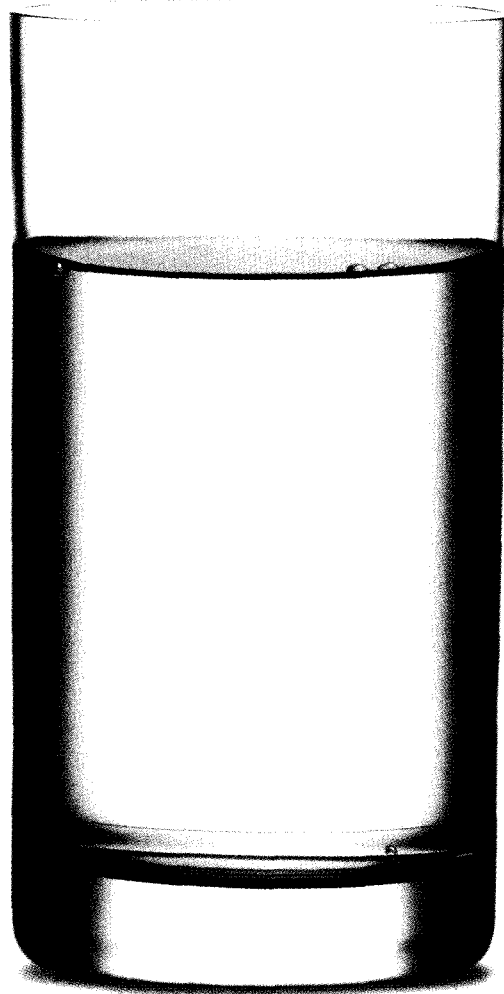
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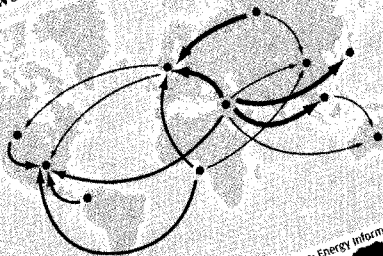
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Global Oil Flows



Source: Energy Information Administration

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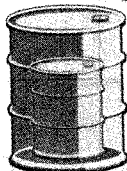
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Projected Global Oil Demand

■ 2004 DEMAND
82 mbpd*

■ 2030 DEMAND
115 mbpd



Source: International Energy Agency
*million barrels per day

OBJECTIVES EFFICIENCIES

ENERGY IMPORTS BY OIL EXPORTING COUNTRIES

	GASOLINE	ELECTRICITY	NATURAL GAS	COAL
Saudi Arabia				
Russia				
Norway				
UAE				
Nigeria				

Source: Energy Information Administration

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

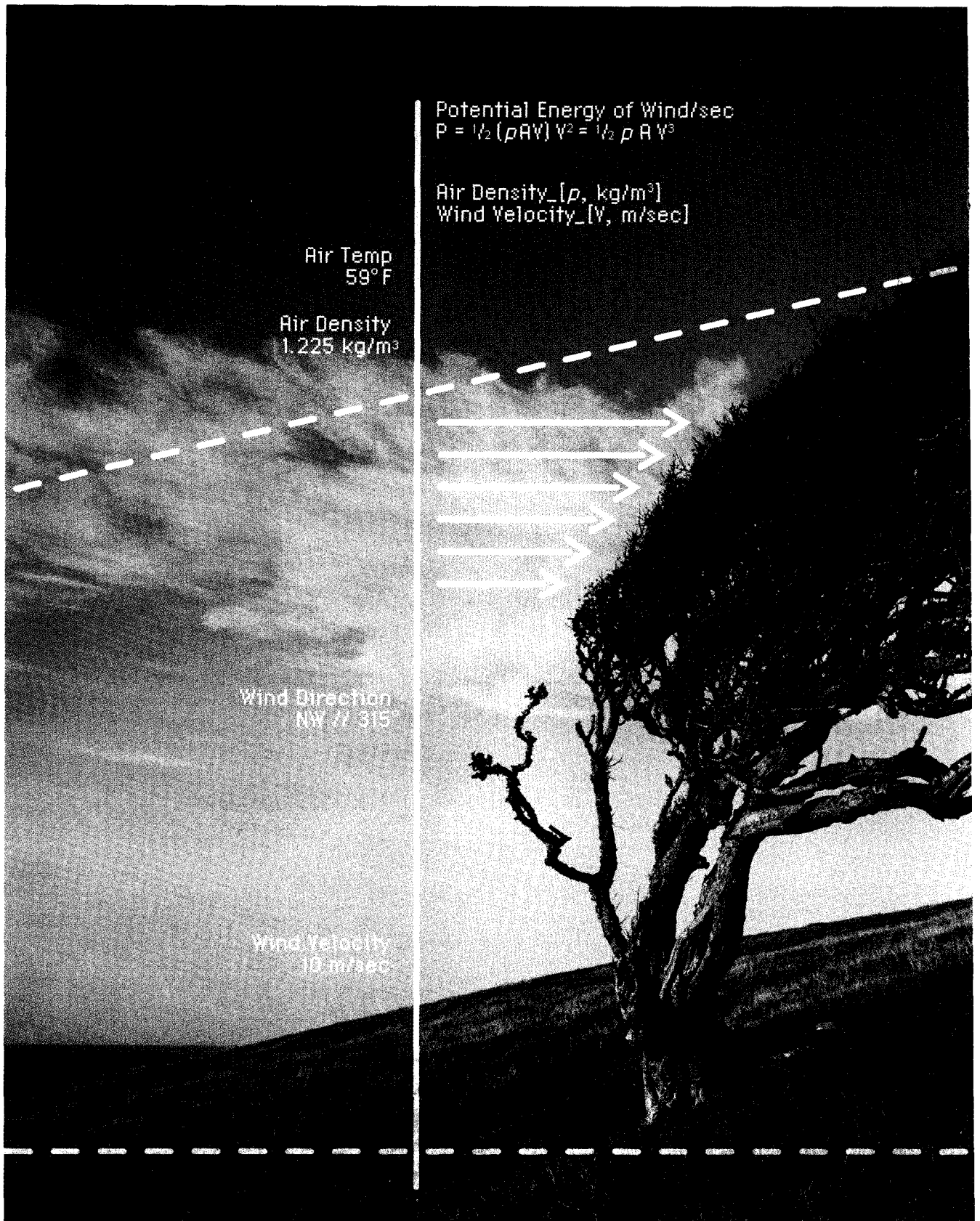
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- ENCOURAGE CONSERVATION/ENERGY EFFICIENCY

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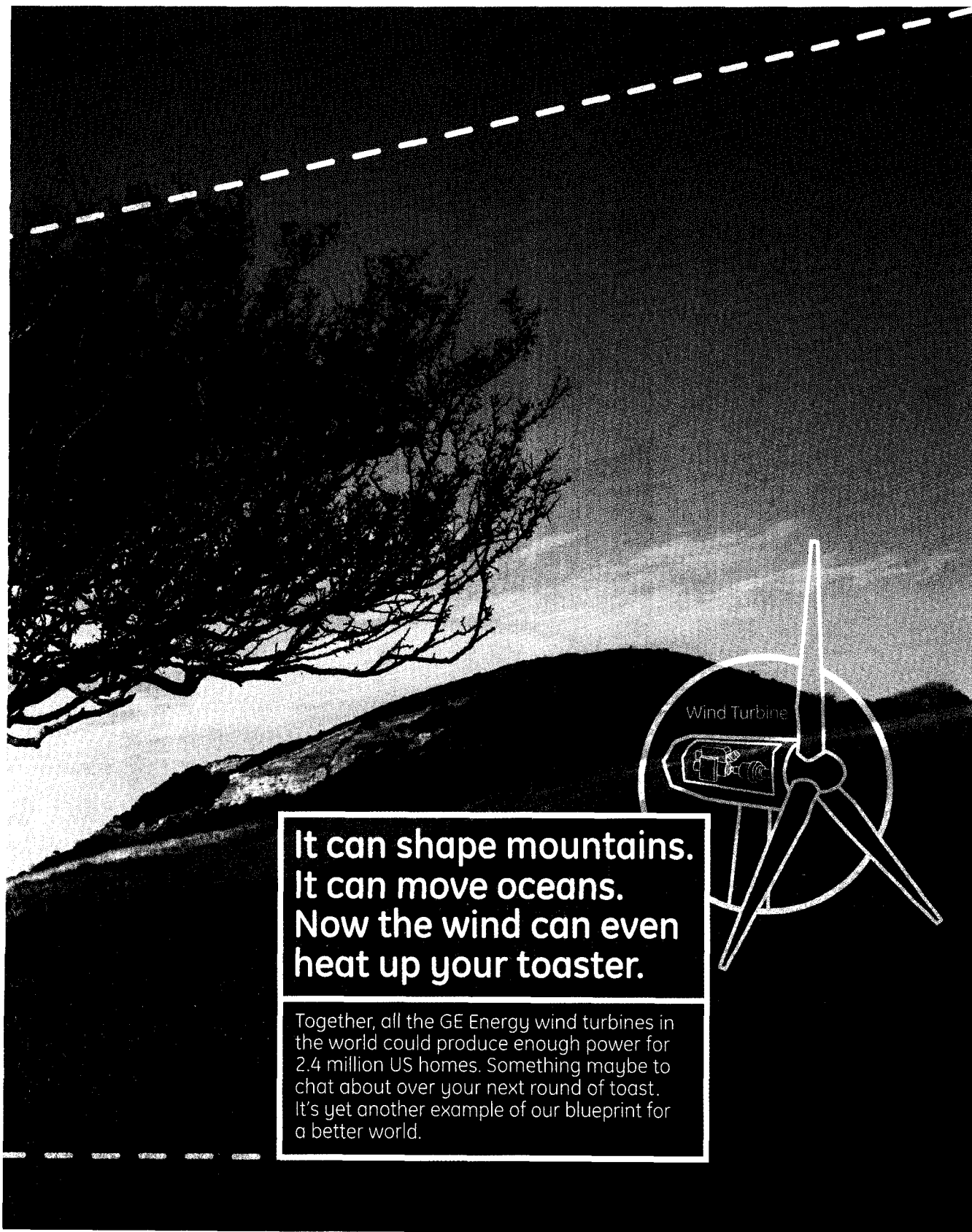
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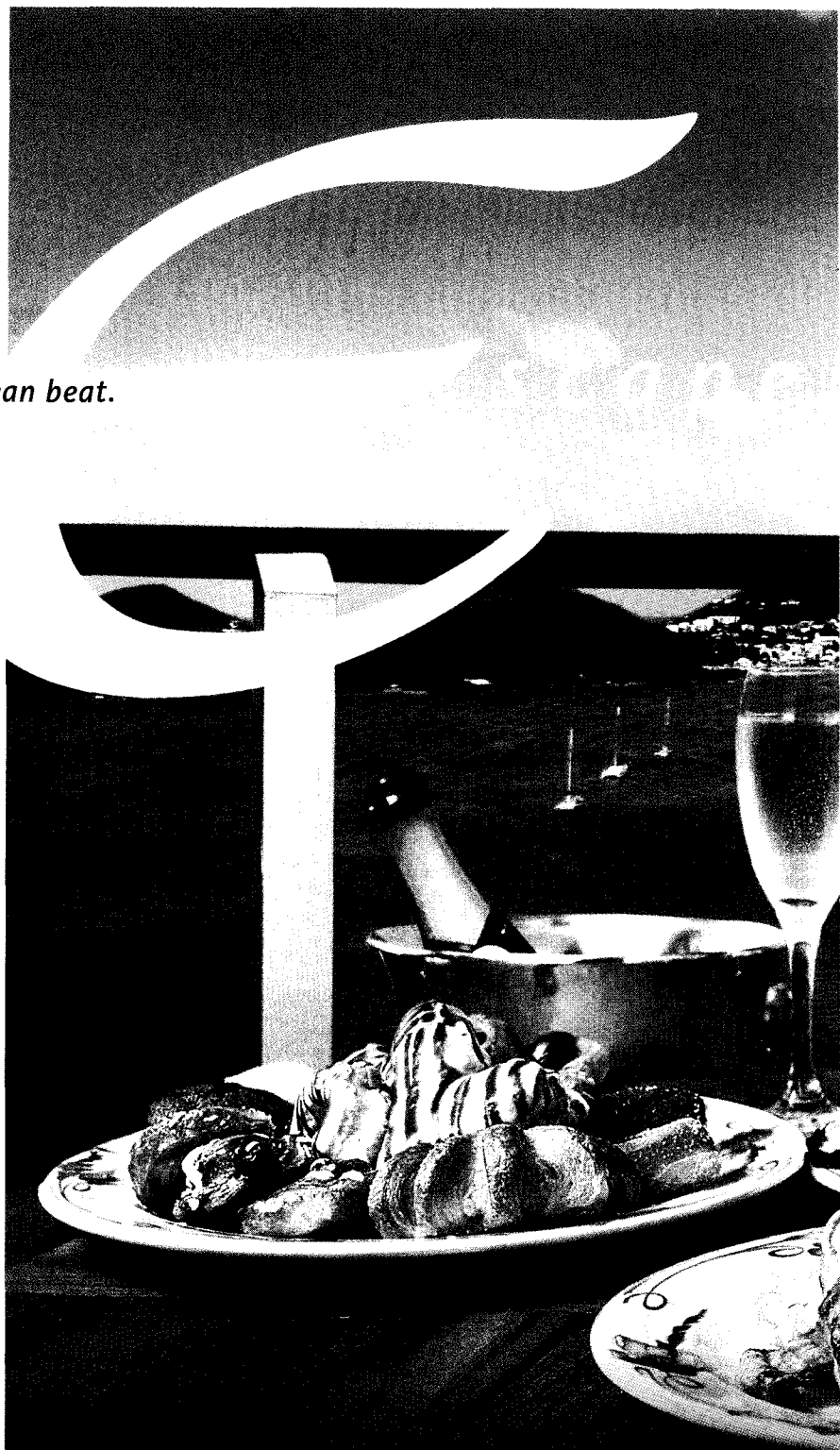
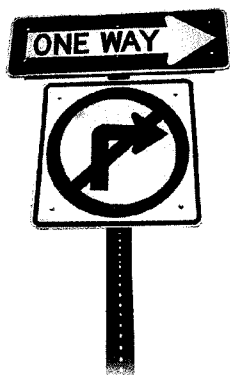


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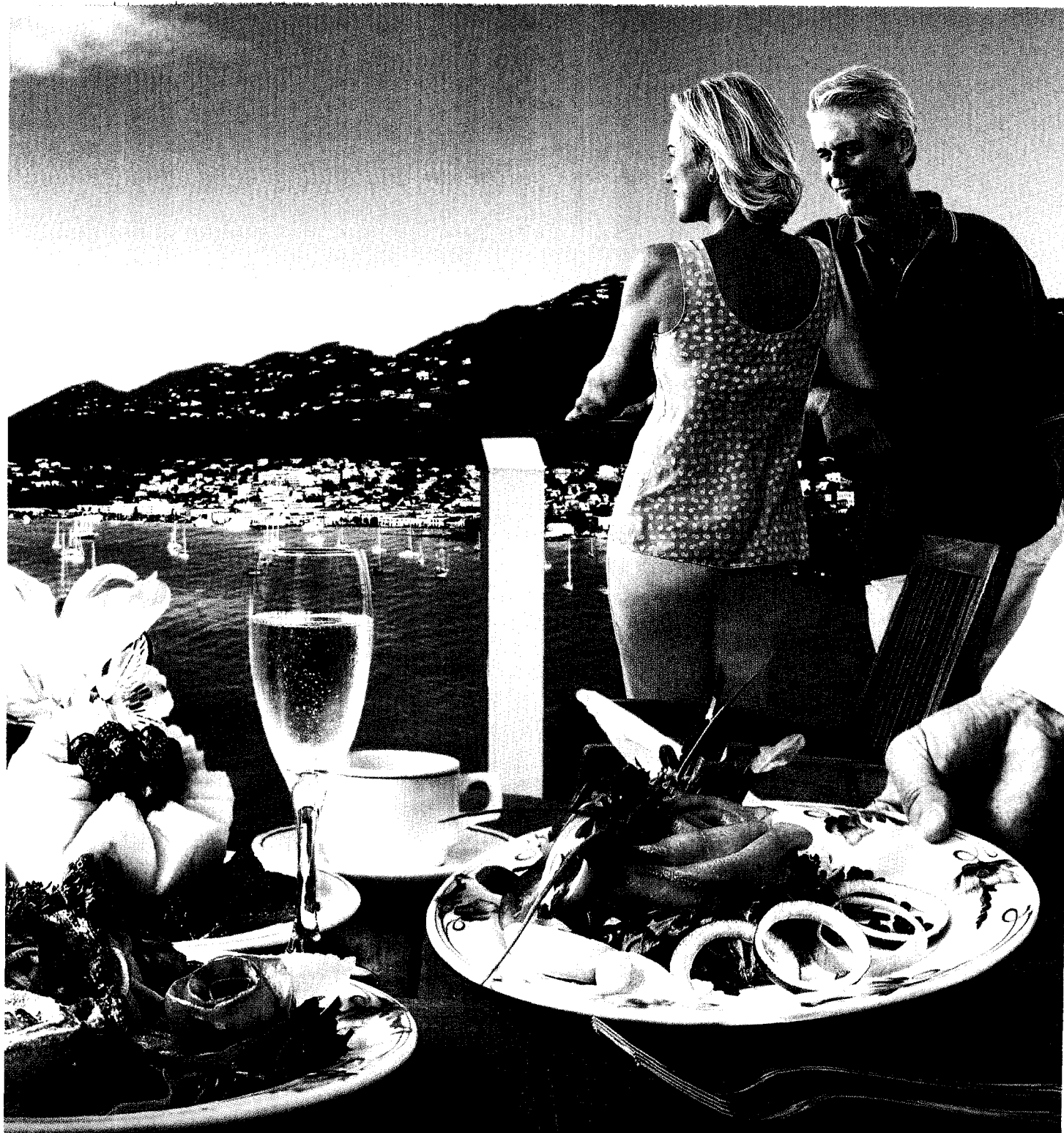
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THE Atlantic

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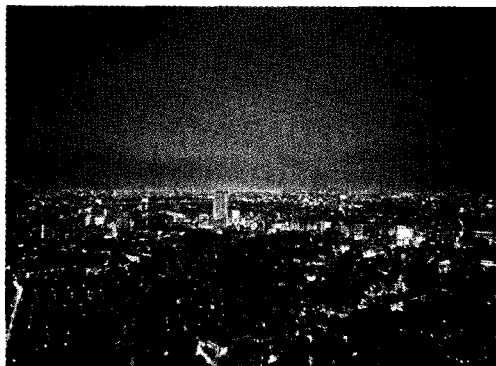
by David Samuels



The Issue in Brief

THE **Atlantic**

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AS NIGHT FALLS

Darkness settles over the Shibuya ward of Tokyo. Amid uncertain cultural expectations, young people in Japan have begun committing suicide in anonymous groups. David Samuels investigates this phenomenon in "Let's Die Together."

PHOTOGRAPH BY MATTHIAS CLAMER
STONE/GETTY IMAGES

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Andrew J. Bacevich, author of "Warrior Politics," talks about the increased politicization of the American military and its troubling potential consequences.

INTERVIEW: THE HARD-LINER

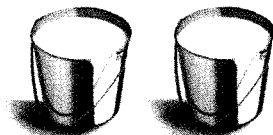
Gershom Gorenberg, author of "The Minister for National Fears," discusses the rise of Avigdor Lieberman, an Israeli politician who advocates the expulsion of Arabs from Israel.

SLIDESHOW: NAMIBIA

Atlantic senior editor Clive Crook narrates photos from his journey to the beautiful and desolate Skeleton Coast.



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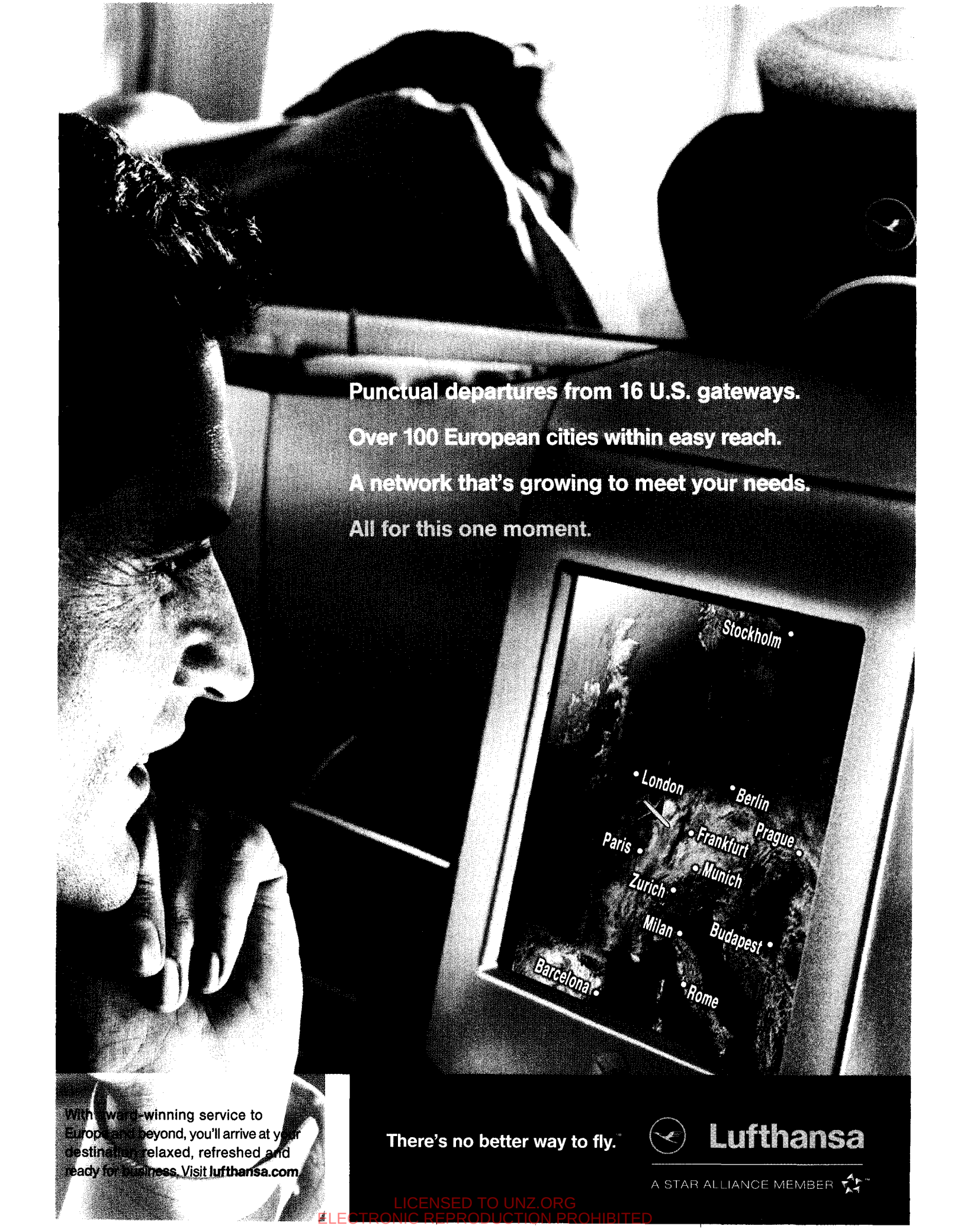
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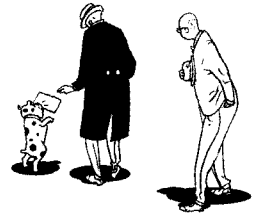


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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



MAY 2007 THE ATLANTIC

JIHAD IN THE PHILIPPINES

Mark Bowden's "Jihadists in Paradise" (March *Atlantic*) was a superb read, but the author does his readers a disservice by labeling Aldam Tilao (aka "Abu Sabaya") a "terrorist." As a journalist who covered the Philippines from 1978 to 2000, I can assure you that Tilao was neither a terrorist nor a jihadist. He was simply a garden-variety thug of the type that has plagued this part of the Philippines for generations. Tilao was a murderous man to be sure, and probably a psychopath, but his only motives were money and media attention, not politics. Bowden mentions that Tilao spent time in the Middle East, but that fact needs to be put in context: At any one time, there are close to 500,000 Filipino men working in the Middle East, where they go to work on construction projects because there are no jobs for them in their own country.

During the 333 years that Catholic Spain ruled the Philippines, the Muslims of Mindanao Island and the Sulu Sea were generally held in contempt and often persecuted by the colonial government. That attitude largely continued under American rule and even after Philippine independence.

As discouraging as this local history is, it has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with the current situation in the Middle East, with Osama bin Laden, or with 9/11. And to suggest such a link allows common criminals such as Tilao to opportunistically cloak themselves in some vague "cause" or grievance, which only makes fighting genuine terrorists all that much more difficult.

Steven Knipp
Washington, D.C.

Mark Bowden replies:

I am in substantial agreement with Steven Knipp about the nature of Aldam

Tilao, as I hope the story makes clear, but there is no doubt that Tilao styled himself a religious terrorist, and recruited money and support on that basis. I suspect that in that sense he was not untypical of garden-variety jihadists worldwide.

BUSHISM AFTER BUSH

Ross Douthat could not be more wrong in his contention that George W. Bush's political legacy will unite the Republican Party for years to come ("It's His Party," March *Atlantic*). First off, Bush never tried to "appeal to the broad electorate"; he won elections by turning out passionate minorities in huge numbers while alienating moderate voters in the hope that they would stay home. This approach worked in 2002 and '04, but in '06 the wheels came off. I also don't see the same motivations in the current crop of GOP presidential contenders that Douthat does. All of them of course "support the troops" (just as all are in favor of breathing oxygen), but none call themselves neoconservatives, just as no aspiring brain surgeon today would claim to be a phrenologist. The battle for the future of GOP foreign policy will be waged by the realists and the isolationists, and Bush's "idealistic" neoconservatism has been relegated to the dustbin.

Douthat asserts that what has "made the last six years so polarizing isn't the president's ideology" but his personality. I am not one to deny that Bush's personality is abrasive, but the real problem for the GOP is that the ideological menu that Karl Rove crafted to win the elections of 2002 and '04 has lost its appeal. It wasn't shared ideology that got libertarians, Christian conservatives, and business moguls into bed together; it was the champagne buzz of winning elections. Now, as they wake up and face the consequences of waging a disastrous war and enacting huge tax cuts, the

coalition partners will quietly slip their pants on and slink back home.

John Ranta
Peterborough, N.H.

The "successes" that Ross Douthat attributes to George W. Bush seem to have taken place entirely at the polls. Let's review: 2000? Stolen, and Al Gore won the popular vote anyway. 2002? Public paralysis in the aftermath of 9/11. 2004? John Kerry's fecklessness, Swift Boat lies, and Ohio voting abuses. And overlaying all three elections was the complicity of the media, which dutifully regurgitated the talking points of the Right Wing Noise Machine (a decisive advantage that Bush can't take credit for). Some successes!

Meanwhile, Douthat's article doesn't devote a single word to the one really big Bush "success": the president's abject sellout to corporate America's interests. Billions of dollars in subsidies for oil companies already earning record profits. Bankruptcy-law "reform" that was a boon to credit-card companies. Tax cuts for CEOs earning 400 times as much as their line workers. A massive handout to Big Pharma in the guise of a benefit for seniors.

By pretending that, despite Bush's disastrous leadership, nothing is fundamentally wrong with the Republican program, Douthat attempts to lend an air of inevitability to the party's continued domination of American politics. It's a transparent ploy by an ideologue anxious to convince himself that last year's drubbing at the polls was only a temporary aberration.

Rob Lewis
Langley, Wash.

Ross Douthat replies:

John Ranta is correct that George W. Bush has often made targeted appeals to the GOP's base, in the hope of turning out

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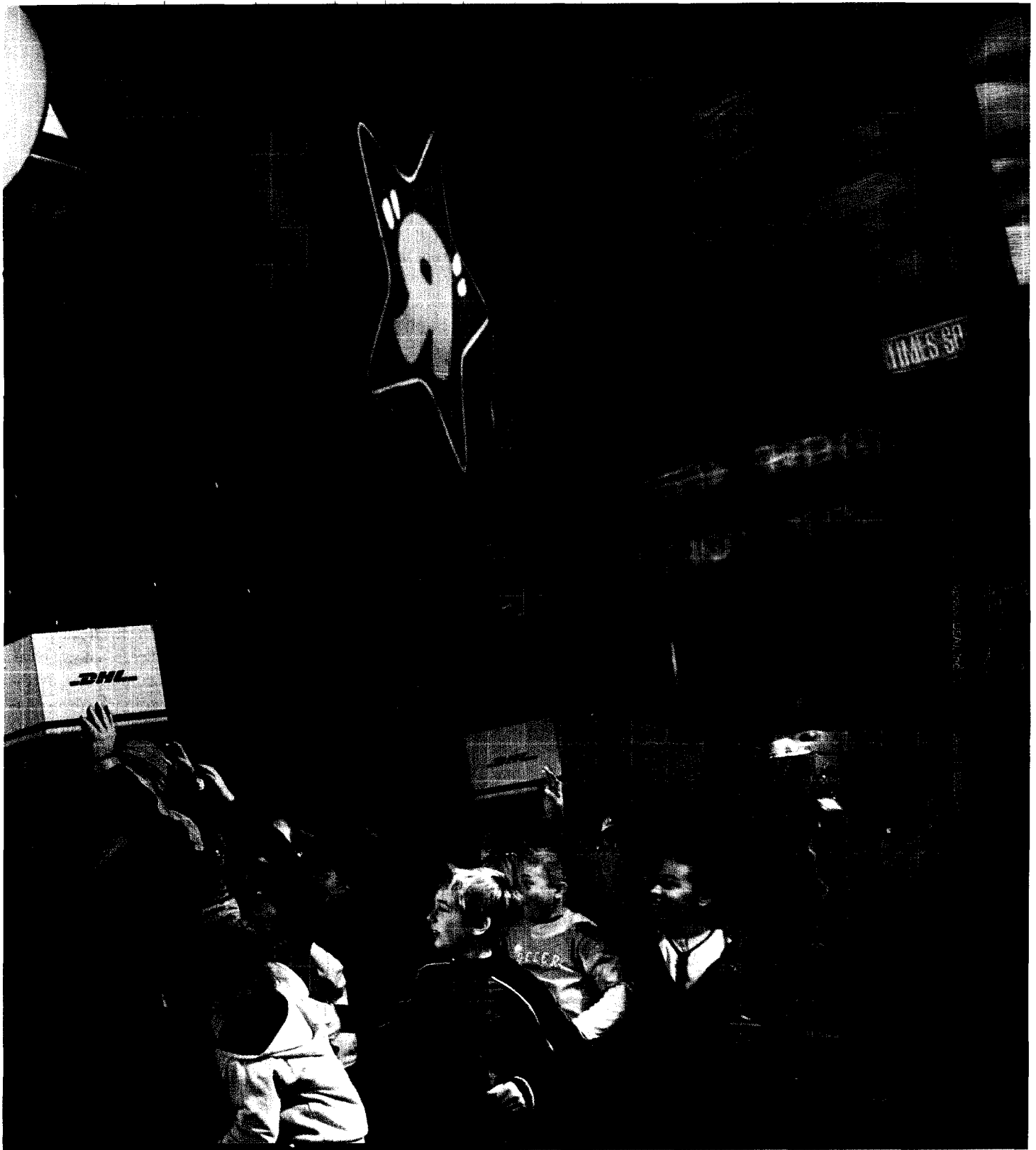
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conservatives in record numbers. However, Bush also won far more self-described "moderate" voters in 2000 and '04 than, say, Bob Dole did in 1996. Rob Lewis may be correct to chalk up this achievement to a mix of luck, brass-knuckle politics, and ballot-box chicanery, but Bush's willingness to deviate from conservative orthodoxy on issues from campaign-finance reform to education likely had something to do with it as well.

Lewis argues that Bush has been a friend of corporate America, which no one would dispute, but it's possible for a politician to show favoritism toward corporations and woo working- and middle-class voters with new spending initiatives. (These are the kind of political complexities that Democrats will rediscover, I suspect, now that their party holds power once again.) The prescription-drug benefit, for instance, may have been "a massive handout to Big Pharma," but it was also a massive handout to retirees, and they rewarded the president at the polls—a lesson that future Republican candidates are unlikely to forget.

As for Ranta's theory that the neo-conservatives have been consigned to the political wilderness, I think that it underestimates the extent to which neoconservatism remains ascendant within the institutional GOP, and the extent to which the form of President Bush's foreign policy (if not the substance of the fiasco in Iraq) retains the support of the GOP base. The real question is not whether neoconservatives will remain influential within the Republican Party—they will—but whether a neoconservative-influenced party can regain the trust of the broader electorate.

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

I enjoyed many parts of Virginia Postrel's "The Truth About Beauty" (March *Atlantic*), but some of her conclusions rest on shaky ground. She writes, for example: "Beauty is not just a social construct, and not every girl is beautiful just the way she is." Well, beauty may or may not be a social construct, but its relative value is—and our

culture (and beauty advertising in particular) teaches girls that their value lies in their appearance. Because Dove dares to claim instead that "Every girl deserves to feel good about herself and see how beautiful she really is," Postrel accuses the company of "encouraging the myth that physical beauty is a false concept." But the Dove campaign isn't going to delude any woman into thinking she missed her calling as a supermodel. On the contrary, by telling girls they are fine the way they are, Dove is encouraging self-esteem independent of appearance.

Susan Carney
Gilbertsville, Pa.

Virginia Postrel replies:

Far from suggesting that beauty is just one value among many, Dove's campaign encourages girls (and to a lesser degree women) to equate how they feel about their looks with how they feel about themselves in general. It does not tell girls that they are "fine" the way they are but that they are "beautiful." The ads focus entirely on appearance, not achievement or character. Echoing a lot of sloppy thinking in our culture, Dove is saying simultaneously that beauty is not a legitimate value and that beauty is an all-encompassing value—a synonym for worth.

FAMILIES MATTER

Clive Crook's assessment of dime-a-day slum schools in India ("The Ten-Cent Solution," March *Atlantic*) is marred by an error common to non-educators. Students enrolled in these schools constitute a self-selected group. Parents who exercise school choice are, by definition, already involved in their children's education, and studies have repeatedly underscored the crucial role that parental involvement plays in educational outcomes. Not surprisingly, therefore, test scores will be higher in such schools. The slum schools that Crook describes deserve high praise for their accomplishments, but the test results he cites are contaminated.

Walt Gardner
Los Angeles, Calif.

OUR ENEMY, THE COW

Your item on "The Bovine Menace" (Primary Sources, March *Atlantic*) claims that "animal flatulence" is responsible for greenhouse-gas emissions. In fact, there is essentially no methane produced in such a manner. The methane of bovine origin, which does play a small part in global warming, is produced by fermentation in the rumen and is "burped" through the mouth.

Henry A. Fribourg
Knoxville, Tenn.

After stating that "livestock are responsible for 18 percent of greenhouse-gas emissions," your Primary Sources item cites deforestation and the fossil fuels used to manufacture livestock fertilizer as two big contributors to the whole mess. Do you mean the livestock or the livestock industry? Because if you have photos of livestock running the earth-moving equipment doing the deforestation, then you have yourself a scoop!

Tom Sacco
Des Moines, Iowa

The Editors reply:

We meant the industry, alas. And although flatulence does produce some methane, we appreciate Henry Fribourg's pointing out that more is produced through burping.

ALL THE PRESIDENTS' LIES

Carl Cannon's article "Untruth and Consequences" (January/February *Atlantic*) fails to answer the implied question in the magazine's cover line ("Why Presidents Lie"). Here's one idea: Presidents lie because, as Richard Neustadt wrote, their chief power is that of persuasion. They are salesmen for policies. Incentives to avoid obvious falsehood exist—believability for the next sale, for starters—but when the public is not paying close attention, the benefits of lying outweigh the costs.

In this light, George W. Bush's mendacity is not different in kind but in ambition from that of other presidents. The Bush administration does not simply lie; it erects edifices of dishonesty



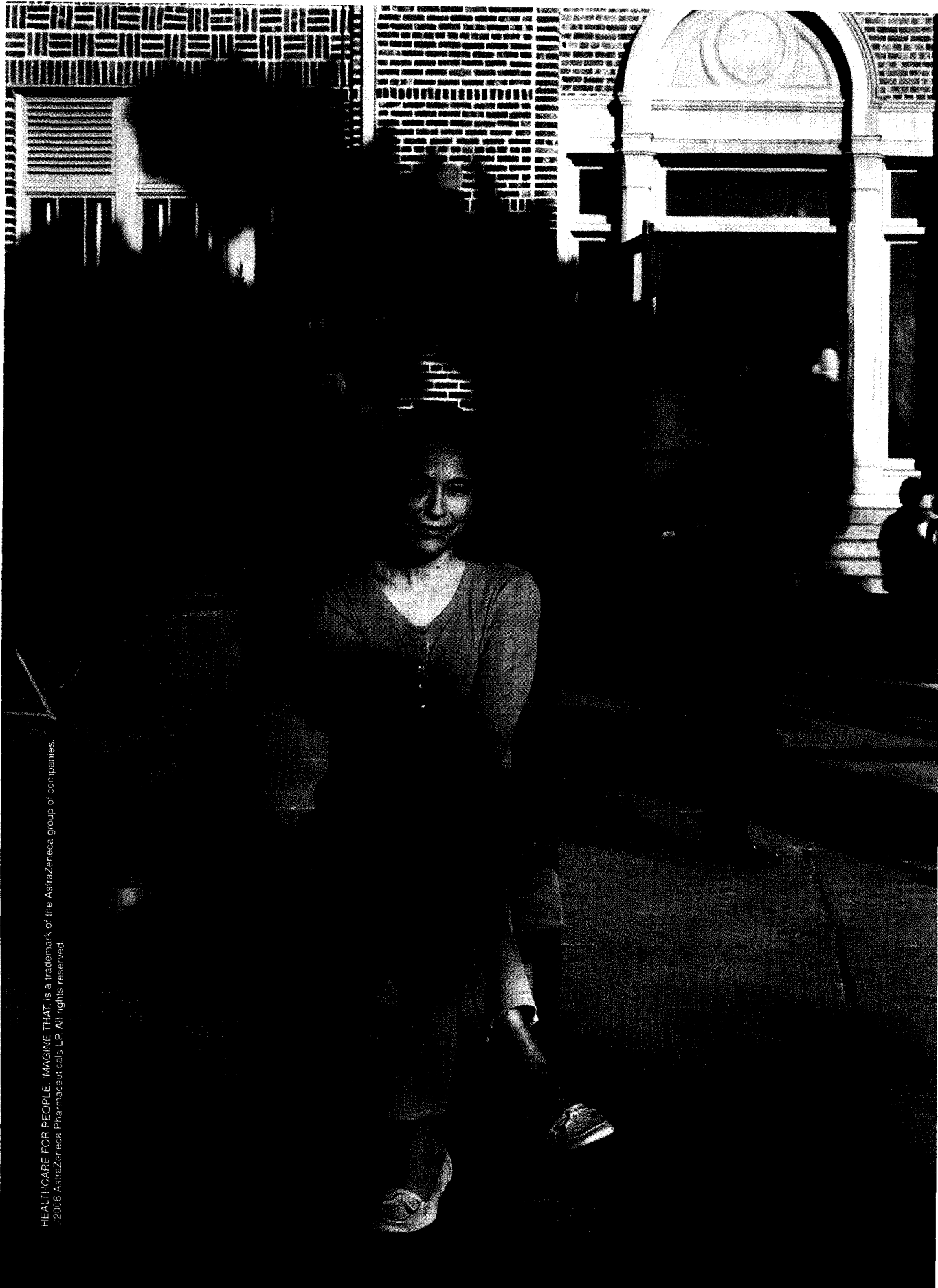
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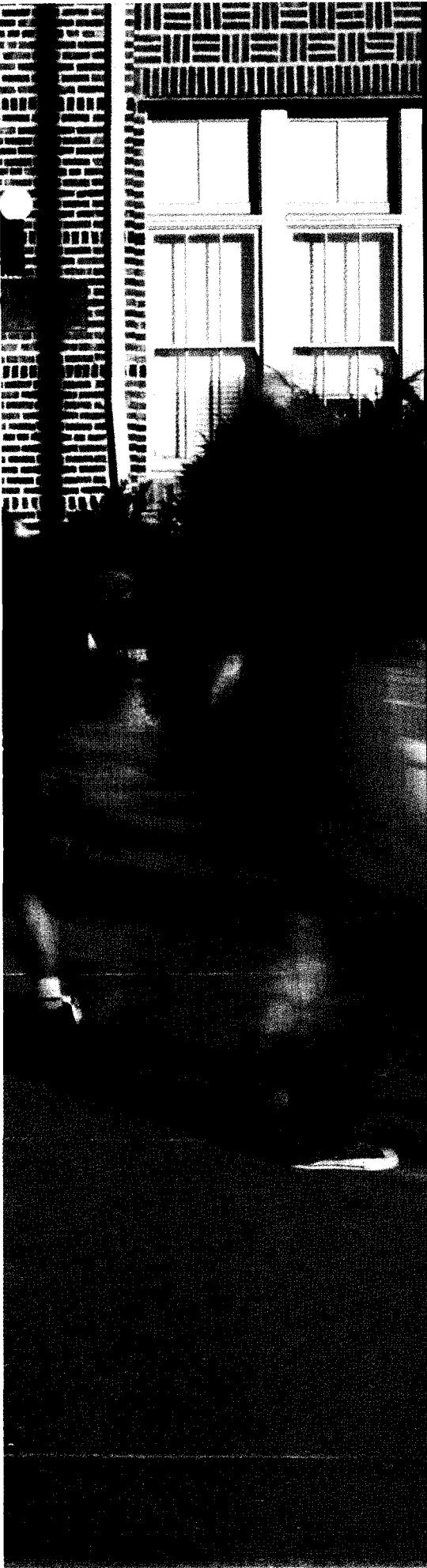


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and assails those who endanger them. Along with lies about weapons of mass destruction—a silly term that enabled war boosters to use the relatively uncontroversial contention that Iraq had *chemical* weapons to imply that Iraq would soon have *nuclear* weapons—the administration falsely claimed that Baathist Iraq worked with al-Qaeda; it denied the existence of the Iraqi insurgency for months; it has consistently exaggerated the role of jihadists like Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in an Iraqi revolt dominated by Sunni tribes; it has reliably overstated the progress of the Iraqi military and government. All this and more, to sell a war.

This litany of dishonesty makes it deeply discouraging to see Cannon suggest that had WMD been found in Iraq, posterity would not consider Bush dishonest. If this is so, it is a stunning indictment of historians' objectivity. I am not yet so pessimistic.

*Benjamin H. Friedman
Somerville, Mass.*

Carl M. Cannon replies:

Benjamin Friedman imputes "pessimistic" impulses to me for asserting that American public opinion would not be so unfavorable toward President Bush had chemical and biological weapons been found in Iraq. I'd say this is realism, not pessimism. To Friedman's main point, I'd add this: Caches of biological and chemical weapons were not discovered in Iraq, but prior to the war even the most principled opponents of the Iraq invasion did not openly doubt their existence. There is some evidence that their absence surprised even Saddam Hussein. The more salient question in this regard is why the Bush administration was so slow to admit the absence of such weapons long after it was clear they weren't around.

THE ROBERTS COURT

I believe that Jeffrey Rosen misunderstands John Roberts's concept of collegiality ("Roberts's Rules," January/February *Atlantic*). The chief justice's

definition of *collegiality*, like the right-wing definition of *bipartisanship*, is to do it his way. The attempt to stifle dissent by discouraging differing opinions is part and parcel of this arrogance. Roberts's intent to follow Chief Justice John Marshall is just as telling, as Marshall also mistrusted democracy and issued his judgments to make certain that those atop the natural order were protected from the rabble.

*James D. Colville
Rochester, Minn.*

Jeffrey Rosen replies:

*It is James Colville, I think, who misunderstands John Marshall's vision, which John Roberts is trying to resurrect. There is nothing "right wing" in the effort to encourage a single unanimous opinion of the Court, rather than expressing separate, or *seriatim*, opinions, which was the traditional English model. When Thomas Jefferson railed against Marshall as a "crafty chief*



judge" who cowed "lazy or timid associates" into joining unanimous opinions "huddled up in conclave," many of the unanimous decisions that he criticized (such as *McCulloch v. Maryland*, upholding the Bank of the United States) were supported by a majority of the nation's citizens and opposed only by illiberal or self-interested local minorities. Furthermore, Roberts acknowledged that in order to resurrect Marshall's vision, he would have to convince his liberal and conservative colleagues that narrow, unanimous opinions were in each of their long-term interests.

ADVICE AND CONSENT

James Watt should be identified as a Scottish inventor, not an "English inventor," as he is in a caption in James Fallows's "Mr. Zhang Builds His Dream Town" (March *Atlantic*). Watt was a native of my hometown, Greenock, Scotland.

Margaret E. Minton
Frederick, Md.

The Editors reply:

Margaret Minton is correct. We regret the error.

James Fallows's fascinating description of Broad Air Conditioning in "Mr. Zhang Builds His Dream Town" is marred by his faulty explanation of how Broad's "nonelectric refrigeration" works. He states that the "nonelectric coolers ... boil a special liquid, a lithium bromide solution, and when the vapors from that solution condense, they cool whatever is near them." But *evaporation* (the opposite of *condensation*) is cooling, as is noted in the next paragraph, where Premier Wen Jiabao is approvingly quoted as saying, "Yes! Yes! For it evaporates and takes away the heat."

Marshall E. Deutsch
Sudbury, Mass.

James Fallows replies:

In the *Broad Company's* account of

Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to their factory, the sentence following the one quoted by Marshall Deutsch declares: "The Premier is a specialist indeed." Now we know why they didn't say that after my visit. My apologies for the condensation/evaporation mix-up.

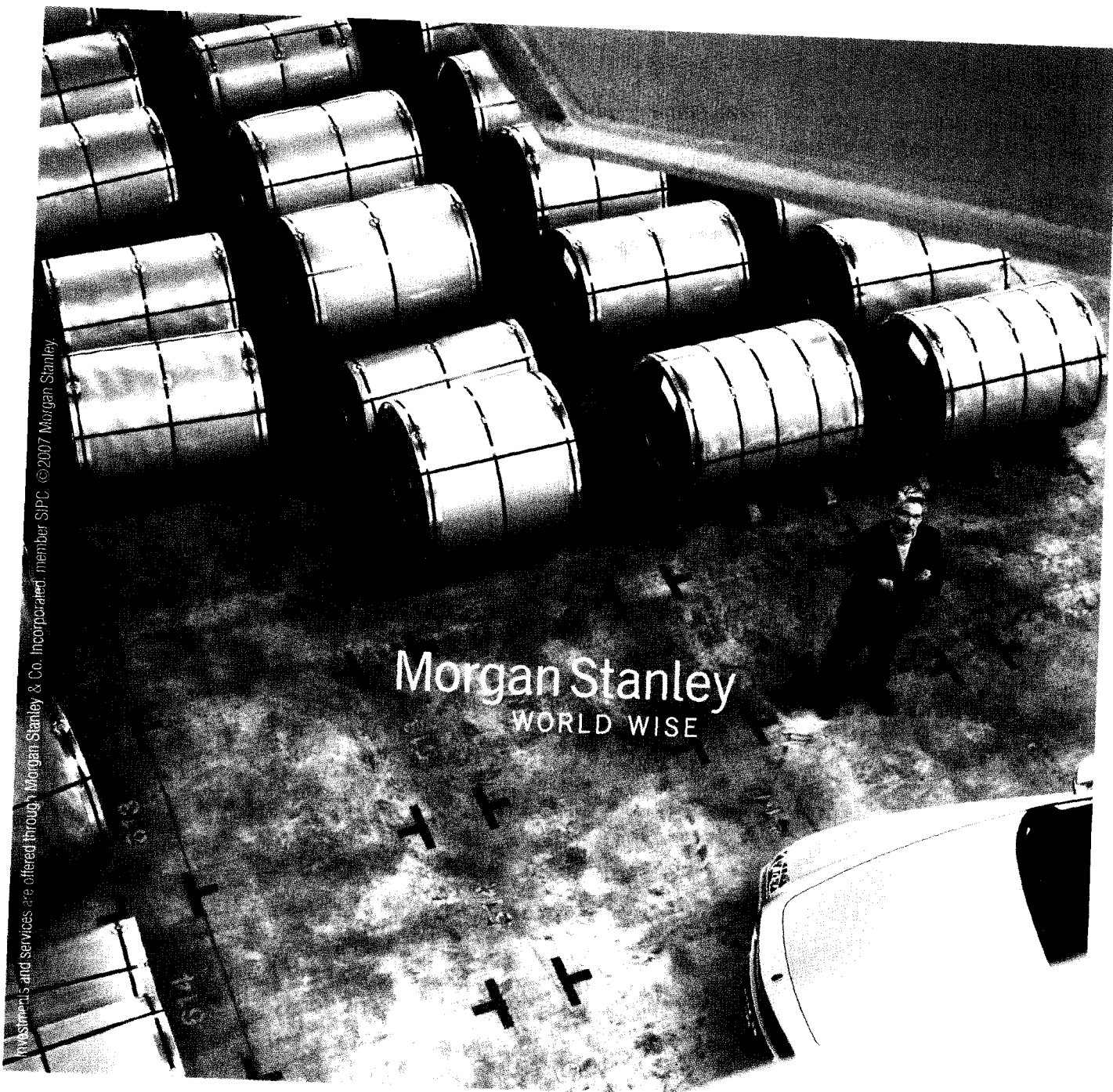
Joshua Green's article about Tim Gill ("They Won't Know What Hit Them," March *Atlantic*) states that in four states where Gill and his allies invested, control of at least one legislative chamber switched to the Democrats last November, and lists Washington as one state where that happened. However, Democrats already controlled both the Washington House and Senate.

Carleen Pagni
Vancouver, Wash.

Joshua Green replies:

Carleen Pagni is correct, and I regret the error. The four states were Iowa, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota.

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THE AGENDA

MAY 2007 THE ATLANTIC



COMMENT

The U.S. military is becoming more politically assertive. This is not a welcome development.

Warrior Politics

BY ANDREW J. BACEVICH

On January 16, 2007, Sergeant Liam Madden, an Iraq War veteran and still an active U.S. marine, paid a visit to Capitol Hill. The date marked the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Madden had chosen it consciously: He was hoping to start a political movement of his own. Acting on behalf of hundreds of his fellow soldiers, he presented members of Congress with an "Appeal for Redress From the War in Iraq."

The text of the appeal, to which more than 1,700 members of the armed forces have now affixed their names, is nothing if not straightforward. In its entirety, it reads:

As a patriotic American proud to serve the nation in uniform, I

respectfully urge my political leaders in Congress to support the prompt withdrawal of all American military forces and bases from Iraq. Staying in Iraq will not work and is not worth the price. It is time for U.S. troops to come home.

The Appeal for Redress is unlikely to alter U.S. policy in Iraq. But the movement behind it (www.appealforredress.org) may prove more consequential. It heralds the appearance of something new to the American political landscape: a soldiers' lobby. In formulating their appeal, men and women in America's fighting forces claim a new prerogative: to engage in collective political action for the explicit purpose of influencing national-security policy.

To be sure, our ostensibly apolitical officer corps has been playing politics for decades. With the rise of the national-security state after World War II, the Joint Chiefs of Staff emerged as big-league political operators. On issues ranging from desegregating the armed forces in the 1940s to the humanitarian interventions of the 1990s, the brass has stalled, dissembled, or liberally reinterpreted directives to suit uniformed interests. To subvert administration initiatives at odds with service predilections, "senior military officials," always anonymous, have mastered the art of the well-timed leak.

MORE ON THEATLANTIC.COM
Read an interview with Andrew Bacevich about this article at www.theatlantic.com/bacevich.

Through it all, however, military politics remained the exclusive purview of top-ranking generals and admirals, and typically occurred behind closed doors. Last year's "Generals' Revolt," with just-retired senior officers launching angry salvos at Donald Rumsfeld, attracted attention in part because it was so unusual. Yet even for these embittered generals, challenging the authority of the commander in chief—as Douglas MacArthur had done a half century ago in Korea, with disastrous results—remained beyond the pale. Attack an especially abrasive and dogmatic secretary of defense? Perhaps. Openly question the president? Never.

Superficially, the Generals' Revolt and the Appeal for Redress have much in common: They are both signals of military discontent, and of military experimentation with public politicking. But the type of politicking implied by the appeal differs. For starters, it was the brainchild of enlisted personnel—of Madden and Jonathan Hutto, a young seaman stationed at Norfolk, Virginia. Although the appeal's signers today include several hundred junior officers, the majority are sergeants, petty officers, and ordinary GI's. In an arena where things typically start at the top, here the impetus comes from below.

Furthermore, the cause animating these rank-and-file soldiers is bolder and broader than that of their commanders: It is to hamstring their commander in chief—to prevent George W. Bush from pursuing a course of action to which he appears unalterably committed. Although sworn to obey, they have undertaken to obstruct.

The appeal is a manifest consequence of a disastrous war. But its deeper roots lie in the transformation of the ethos of the enlisted corps over the past three decades. With the establishment of the all-volunteer force in 1973, those serving in the ranks began to see themselves as full-fledged members of the profession of arms. At the same time, a new American way of war placed a premium on advanced technology, requiring highly

skilled and well-educated troops. One result is troops who are opinionated, who expect their opinions to be taken seriously, and who are more likely to ask what the Army can do for them.

The creation of the all-volunteer force had a second consequence. Military service, once viewed (at least nominally) as a civic obligation, has become a matter of choice. As a result, the burden of "defending our freedom" no longer falls evenly across society. Those choosing to serve do not represent a cross section of America, and most are presumably well aware of that fact.

To assuage uneasy consciences, the many who do not serve proclaim their high regard for the few who do. This has vaulted America's fighting men and women to the top of the nation's moral hierarchy. The character and charisma long ago associated with the pioneer or the small farmer—or carried in the 1960s by Dr. King and the civil-rights movement—has now come to rest upon the soldier. The signatories of the Appeal for Redress make full use of the prerogatives of this ranking.

Justice alone seemingly demands that they be allowed to do so. The thousands of Americans killed in Iraq include no members of Congress and not a single general. Shouldn't those who bear the burden of war have some say in determining its future course?

Congressmen Dennis Kucinich of Ohio, John Lewis of Georgia, and James McGovern of Massachusetts (all Democrats) think so: They have embraced the Appeal for Redress. "No one speaks with more moral authority or understanding of the complexity of Iraq than the brave men and women who serve in our armed forces," Kucinich has said.

In fact, however, empowering groups of soldiers to join in the debate over contentious issues is short-sighted and dangerous. Implicit in the appeal is the suggestion that national-security policies somehow require the consent of those in uniform. Lately, media outlets have reinforced this notion, reporting as newsworthy the results of polls that

asked soldiers whether administration plans meet with their approval.

On matters of policy, those who wear the uniform ought to get a vote, but it's the same one that every other citizen gets—the one exercised on Election Day. To give them more is to sow confusion about the soldier's proper role, which centers on service and must preclude partisanship. Legitimizing soldiers' lobbies is likely to warp national-security policy and crack open the door to praetorianism.

The Appeal for Redress does not pose an immediate threat to the republic. It's been signed by only a tiny minority of U.S. soldiers, and the movement could simply peter out, becoming little more than a minor historical curiosity, rather than a harbinger of something larger. Yet in either case, it offers further evidence of advancing constitutional decay.

As the Founders anticipated, a democracy intent on maintaining a great and powerful military establishment confronts acute challenges. Deflecting those challenges today requires renewed attention to hallowed principles of civilian control. In recent decades, these principles have eroded badly. The irresponsible politicking of generals and admirals is one reason. But so, too, is the abdication by Congress of its constitutional duties on matters of peace and war—and the recent exploitation of that abdication by an imperial, irresponsible, and habitually dissembling administration.

In an environment where governing principles have seemingly ceased to govern, it is surely understandable that some members of a more assertive military would be tempted to dip their toes into political waters. What is unforgivable is that elected officials and activists have indulged and nourished that desire, while the problems that are producing an increasingly politicized military establishment continue to be ignored. ▀

Andrew J. Bacevich is professor of history and international relations at Boston University. He is writing a history of U.S. civil-military relations.

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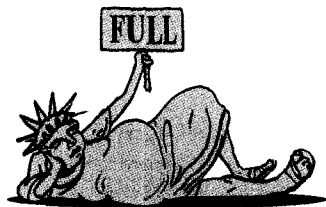


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CALENDAR

WHAT TO WATCH FOR IN THE WEEKS AHEAD

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MAY 1

¿Se Puede?

Last year's crop of pro-immigration marches and work boycotts, which drew as many as half a million demonstrators into the streets of L.A., Dallas, New York, and Phoenix, may become an annual rite. Activists are planning a new round, starting today, to oppose hard-line immigration measures and push for a variety of amnesty and guest-worker programs.

MAY 1

A Posthumous Premiere

The Anna Nicole Smith media blitz continues from beyond the grave. *Illegal Aliens*, an unrated,

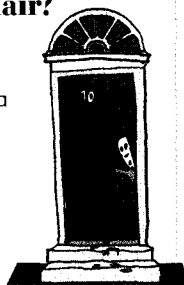
straight-to-DVD sci-fi flick starring the deceased bombshell and other scantily clad babes trying to save the planet from a terrorist space invader, opens today. The executive producer (on his way to the bank, presumably) predicts it will be Smith's *Abbey Road*.

MAY 2

Bye Bye Blair?

With Tony

Blair's government mired in a "cash for honours" scandal and the deeply unpopular Iraq War, speculation has arisen about whether Blair will make it past today, his 10th anniversary in office, or instead heed calls to step down early and hand the reins to his likely successor, Gordon Brown.



ALSO THIS MONTH Unto the Breach

Though Britain is withdrawing many of its troops from Iraq, Prince Harry, the hard-partying second lieutenant known to his regiment as "Troop Commander Wales," may get his wish to see combat when he deploys there, probably this month. Despite fears that he'll make an attractive target for insurgents, he'll join a long line of British royals who have gone to war.



Sticky Fingers

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, freshly anointed with the power to rule by decree, has announced that on May Day the state will take hold of oil fields in the Orinoco Belt (which produce about 600,000 barrels of synthetic oil a day). Barring a last-minute deal, foreign companies like Chevron, Exxon Mobil, ConocoPhillips, and BP could be out on their ears.

Watching Me Watching You

Prompted by technology that allows viewers to skip commercials, Nielsen rolls out updated television ratings this month that seek to take digital video recorders into account and measure ad viewership. Predictions that DVRs would kill off TV ads appear to be off the mark: Nielsen reports that viewers watch 40 percent of the commercials they could skip.

MAY 3

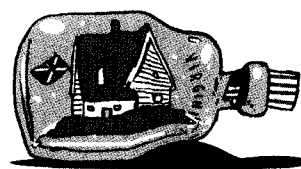
Hoist Your Kilts!

Three hundred years after uniting with England, Scotland may move toward sovereignty if the Scottish National Party, which has led narrowly in the polls, prevails in the national parliamentary election today. The party has promised a referendum on independence.

MAY 11

Terrorist on Trial

Luis Posada Carriles, a 78-year-old alleged by Cuba and Venezuela to be a right-wing terrorist who participated in a 1976 plane bombing that killed 73 people, stands trial today in El Paso for lying to immigration officials. Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez have called the United States hypocritical for refusing to extradite an alleged terrorist.



MAY 11-13

Classic Colonial

Jamestown, Virginia, the first (barely) surviving British colony in what would become the United States, celebrates its 400th anniversary this weekend with planned visits from President Bush and Queen Elizabeth II.

MAY 14

Riding High

Floyd Landis, the cyclist from Amish country who won last year's Tour de France after a spectacular comeback, only to test positive for performance-enhancing drugs, faces the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency today. He

could be stripped of his title and banned from racing for two years. Landis, who blames faulty lab tests, has already said he'll sit out major events this year.



MAY 17

The Unification Church

The Russian Orthodox Church ends a bitter 80-year rift today when the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, founded by émigrés in New York after the Bolshevik Revolution, reunites with the mother Church in a Moscow service.

MAY 19

South Korea Loves Transgendered Pop Stars

Wedding bells ring today for Harisu, the born-a-he video vixen singer and actress wildly popular in South Korea, where a music producer has also assembled a "girl" band composed of post-op transgenders to cash in on the fad. Harisu and her betrothed, Micky Kung, a baby-faced rapper/dancer, plan to adopt.

MAY 28

Summer of Love

Famous for its feuds, rock music is experiencing a wave of reunions: The Police, who broke up after fisticuffs in 1984, reunite with a world tour that starts today, while Van Halen and Genesis have also discussed plans to head out on tour.

PRIMARY SOURCES

POLITICS

Hold Your Bets

After the last two presidential elections, the predictive power of exit polls has fallen into disrepute. But what about early polls? For Republican primaries, they're worth watching, a recent analysis by the Pew Research Center suggests; for Democratic primaries and the general election, though, election watchers should be wary of their findings. The authors looked back at nearly half a century of preprimary polling and found that early Republican front-runners are usually safe bets: In seven open GOP contests, the early leaders (the candidates who drew the strongest support in national polls taken more than a year before the general election) won the nomination six times.

The same wasn't true, however, for leading Democrats, who got their party's nod only 50 percent of the time. In the run-up to the general election, early polling has an even less-impressive predictive record: A review of polls spanning the same period "found many of them forecasting the wrong winner," and even when they predicted correctly, they were often way off as to the margin of victory. Moreover, the authors note, past precedents are likely to be less relevant to the 2008 election: Front-loaded primaries, early fund-raising events, and multiple potential front-runners make this season's guessing game harder—and possibly more pointless—than ever.

—"How Reliable Are the Early Presidential Polls?" Nilanthy Samaranyake and Scott Keeter, Pew Research Center

Democratic Nomination Contests

Some early-poll leaders	Nominee
2003 Lieberman, Kerry	Kerry
1999 Gore	Gore
1991 Cuomo	Clinton
1987 Hart	Dukakis
1983 Mondale	Mondale
1975 Wallace, Kennedy	Carter
1971 Muskie	McGovern
1959 Kennedy, Stevenson	Kennedy

Republican Nomination Contests

Some early-poll leaders	Nominee
1999 Bush	Bush
1995 Dole	Dole
1987 Bush	Bush
1979 Reagan, Ford	Reagan
1967 Romney, Nixon	Nixon
1963 Rockefeller	Goldwater
1959 Nixon	Nixon



LAW ENFORCEMENT

The Out-of-Towners

Savvy tourists don't need a regression analysis to know that they should ease off the gas when they come to a Podunk town, but two George Mason University professors now have the proof. By examining 29,752 speeding citations issued in April and May 2001 in Massachusetts, they found that who and where you are matters as much as how fast you're going. An out-of-town driver stopped by a police officer in any given area has a 51 percent chance of getting slapped with a fine, versus 30 percent for a local, and the average fine for an out-of-towner is \$5 higher. Local police are 10 percent more likely

to fine out-of-town drivers and 20 percent more likely to fine out-of-staters, while state troopers ticket out-of-state drivers at a rate 28 percent higher than in-staters. The poorer the town (in terms of property-tax receipts), the more likely its cops are to target drivers passing through; fines also increase the farther away drivers live, since distance makes them less likely to contest the ticket. The study also found that women are more likely to get off with a warning, though the gender advantage disappears around age 75.

—"Political Economy at Any Speed: What Determines Traffic Citations?" Michael Makowsky and Thomas Stratmann, George Mason University

PSYCHOLOGY

Stalin Was Right

"A single death is a tragedy," Joseph Stalin said. "A million deaths is a statistic." Now a psychology professor at the University of Oregon has tried to figure out why, with a paper suggesting that an evolved behavioral response may mean that we don't *feel* that genocide is real unless we can focus on a particular individual. People understand reality in two ways, he argues: one is intuitive and experiential, the other is analytical and rational. Making decisions based on intuition is usually easier and more efficient than forming a judgment after analysis, and although our rational processes are supposed to monitor our intuitive impressions, they're often "rather lax." A case in point: When participants in a study were asked to donate money either to a starving girl in Mali or to a larger group of famine victims represented only by a number, they gave significantly greater amounts to the wide-eyed girl. Moreover, contributions to the starving girl actually dropped when statistical information about the number of people suffering from severe hunger accompanied the girl's name and picture.

—"If I Look at the Mass I Will Never Act": Psychic Numbing and Genocide," Paul Slovic, University of Oregon

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New York Public Library: New York

Live From the NYPL: "The Romance of It All: Three Aspects of Latin America"

May 8th, 15th, 22nd, 7pm | nypl.org

LIVE from the NYPL presents a three-part conversation on Latin America with Alma Guillermoprieto, author of *The Heart That Bleeds* and most recently *Dancing with Cuba: A Memoir of the Revolution*. With weekly sessions beginning May 8, Guillermoprieto will lead discussions ranging from the culture and politics to the modern intrigue and fascination with several Latin American countries.



University of Michigan: Ann Arbor

Zell Visiting Writers Series: The Hopwood Awards Program

April 18th, 3:30pm | umich.edu

Susan Stamborg, special correspondent for NPR's Morning Edition, will share defining moments from her noteworthy journalism career, including her experience as the first woman to anchor a national nightly news program. Offering memories from her most famous interviews including conversations with Rosa Parks, Billy Crystal, and Luciano Pavarotti, Stamborg will present a highly entertaining, "can't-miss" program.

Vanderbilt University and the Nashville Public Library: Nashville

Thinking Out of the (Lunch) Box Events: "Playing Yourself: Authenticity, Identity, and Cultural Consumption"

Date in May TBD 11:30am | vanderbilt.edu/lunchbox

Attendees will enjoy a boxed lunch and the "Playing Yourself" discussion led by Jennifer Lena, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Vanderbilt University. Examining the modern perspective of how we define identity, measure self worth, and subscribe to cultural mores, Lena will challenge and engage audience members with provocative insight.



Chicago History Museum: Chicago

Chicago Treasures: Ana Castillo and Robert Falls

April 18th, 7pm | chicagohs.org

Moderated by Steve Edwards, host of Chicago Public Radio's Eight Forty-Eight, this session of "Chicago Treasures" spotlights poet and novelist Ana Castillo and Robert Falls, acclaimed artistic director at Goodman Theatre. Participants of this moderated conversation will gain insight into Castillo and Falls' contribution to Chicago's literary and theatrical growth, while also understanding how the city itself influenced their work.

University of Minnesota: Minneapolis

Story & Psyche

April 25th, 26th 7:30pm | umn.edu



A two-evening event, "Story & Psyche" offers avid readers and aspiring writers unique insight into the literary process—from the initial idea to character development and beyond. Led by renowned writers including Carlos Eire, author of *Waiting for Snow in Havana*, and Andre Aciman, author of *Out of*

Egypt, among others, "Story & Psyche" provides readings the first evening followed by a panel discussion the second evening.

Free Library of Philadelphia: Philadelphia

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food

May 2nd, 8pm | library.phila.gov

Barbara Kingsolver, acclaimed novelist and author of the *Poisonwood Bible*, will share her knowledge of local food economies as described in her latest work of nonfiction, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food*. Attendees will enjoy a discussion around several key issues from this forthcoming release including the modern food industry and sustainable agriculture.

Princeton University: Princeton, New Jersey

"The Free Society: Foundations and Challenges"

May 14-15, 2007, Time TBD | princeton.edu



The James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions in the Department of Politics at Princeton University promotes teaching and scholarship in constitutional law and political thought and asks: What conditions are necessary to sustain America's experiment in ordered liberty?

This event will gather a dozen or more leading minds to discuss the nature and relationships between free political institutions and the cultural conditions for their establishment and maintenance

University of Virginia: Charlottesville

"Are Western Leadership Concepts Appropriate in Islamic Cultures? Implications for Global Business Affairs"

April 23, 2007, 10am | millercenter.org

Presented by the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia and co-hosted by the International Business Society at Darden, this forum event will feature unique perspectives on this emerging area of focus. Panelists include Steffan Schubert, a banker who serves as managing director of Tejoori Limited and former chief executive officer of the Dubai International Finance Exchange, as well as David E. Martin, founding chief executive officer of M-CAM, Inc. and a Batten Fellow at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business.



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MEDIA

Pink Slips and Red Ink

Even as newspapers around the country send reporters packing at the behest of the papers' investors, a new study finds that the fastest way to profits may be spending more, not less, on the newsroom. Two marketing professors crunched four years' worth of economic data from 1,400 daily papers in the United States, and they came up with a formula to determine the most profitable mix of spending—whether in the newsroom, to improve news quality; in the circulation department, to hook more readers; or in the ad sales department. They found that investing in the newsroom has the biggest impact on a paper's bottom line: Improving news quality not only increases circulation; it's actually as effective in luring advertisers as putting

money into ad sales teams. (The authors also found that having more ads in a paper increases circulation as well, because Americans love to flick through them.) The researchers then ran the newspapers in their sample through their formula and found that most papers (60 percent of papers with small staffs and 80 percent with large staffs) are near the right spending balance; however, many (22 percent of small papers and 15 percent of bigger ones) could raise profits by putting more money into the newsroom. On the other hand, cutting newsroom spending, because it exerts a negative influence on other forms of revenue, inevitably forces further cuts and sends a newspaper into a "suicide spiral."

—"Uphill or Downhill? Locating Your Firm on a Profit Function," Murali K. Mantrala et al., *Journal of Marketing*



ECONOMICS
Fair Trade

The knock on free trade has always been that it makes the poor poorer: Small-scale farmers have a hard time selling their goods at home when cheap agricultural goods from abroad flood their markets. This argument has been employed by foes of the Central American Free Trade Agreement, which aims to eliminate trade tariffs between the United States and five Central American countries and the Dominican Republic; the agreement, critics say, will expose the poor countries to competition from the United States but offer them little in return, since 80 percent of the region's exports to the U.S. market already arrive duty-free. But the pro-CAFTA case gets a boost from a recent study in which three economists predict that in most cases, the trade

agreement will actually improve the welfare of the rural poor in developing countries. The study finds that although rural incomes will likely decline as protective tariffs are phased out over the next 20 years or so, food prices in those countries will drop enough in almost every scenario to make up the difference—often with extra cash to spare. The typical rural household in CAFTA countries devotes a substantial chunk of its earnings to buying basic food items, and import tariffs (some as high as 154 percent) inflate their cost. As a result, the authors find, "lower food prices would mitigate and, in most cases, reverse the negative effect that lower incomes would have on rural welfare."

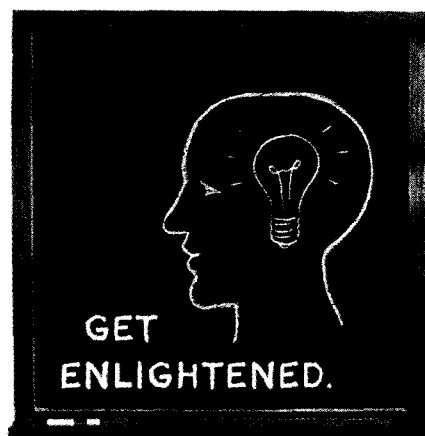
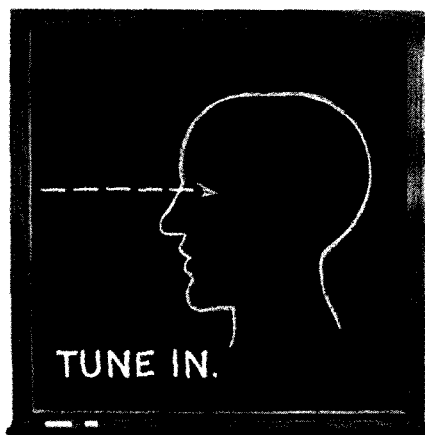
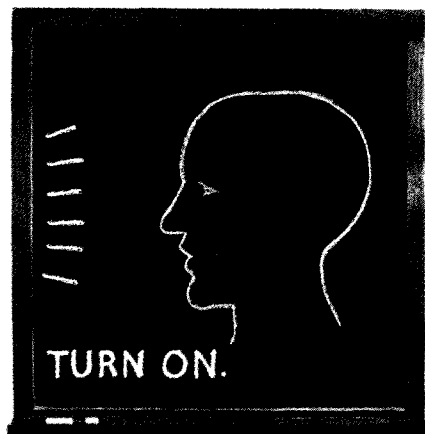
—"Does Agricultural Liberalization Reduce Rural Welfare in Less Developed Countries? The Case of CAFTA," J. E. Taylor, A. Y. Naude, and N. Jesurun-Clements, *University of California, Davis*

TERRORISM

School for Suicide

Not all suicide bombers are created equal, and terrorist leaders know it. According to a new study from the National Bureau of Economic Research, the most spectacular (and technically difficult) suicide attacks are frequently assigned to older and more educated bombers, who are more likely to succeed. Using data collected by the Israeli Security Agency, researchers reviewed all Palestinian suicide attacks against targets in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip between September 2000 and August 2005—a total of 151 incidents that killed 515 people and injured almost 3,500 more. Ranking the suicide bombers by the perceived value of their targets (large cities and civilian targets were considered more valuable than smaller cities and military targets) and the number of people they killed and wounded, the researchers found that the five deadliest bombers were almost five years older on average than the typical bomber, that three of them either had or were pursuing advanced degrees (compared with just 17 percent of the sample as a whole), and that all five blew themselves up in major Israeli cities—the most prestigious and challenging of targets. These top five bombers killed an average of 22.8 people per attack and wounded an average of 88, versus 3 and 25.2 respectively for the bombers in the rest of the sample. Overall, younger and less-educated bombers were more likely to detonate too early, get caught by the authorities, or succumb to second thoughts. Human capital, the authors speculate, is the best yardstick for measuring competence at a task in which "on-the-job" training and "learning by doing" don't figure into the equation.

—"Attack Assignments in Terror Organizations and the Productivity of Suicide Bombers," Efraim Benmelech (Harvard University) and Claude Berrebi (RAND Corporation), *National Bureau of Economic Research*



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THE INTERNET

So You Want to Buy a Wizard

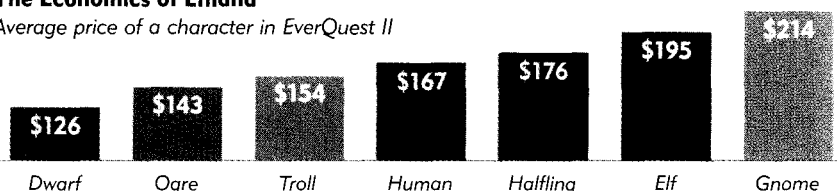
You're a well-meaning dwarf battling an evil troll on the forbidding island of Freeport. If you're to survive the fight, you'll need thicker armor and maybe a magic potion or two. What to do? Press the "pause" button and visit Station Exchange, an online auction house flush with armor, weapons, and magic for players of the popular role-playing game EverQuest II. Sony Online Entertainment, which created EverQuest II and Station Exchange, recently completed a year-long study of the virtual auction house. The results show a thriving community whose members inhabit a virtual world, fight virtual battles, and buy and sell virtual goods—all for *real* money. Between June 2005 and June 2006, 9,042 role players spent \$1.87 million on virtual goods, with an average

of \$91.55 per player spent on characters alone. The auctions included items ranging from swords costing a few dollars to complete characters with special powers for up to \$2,000 each. While auction participants were overwhelmingly males under 40 (surprise!), a further demographic breakdown showed a sharp division: The most active sellers were 18- to 22-year-olds, while older players did most of the buying. The study suggests younger players may have more time to devote to scouring the game for marketable products, while older players have less time but more disposable income. Most sellers made between \$200 and \$500 a month, but the top two appear to have made Station Exchange into a virtual career: In one year, each sold more than \$37,000 worth of virtual goods.

—"Station Exchange: Year One," Noah Robischon, Sony Online Entertainment

The Economics of Elfland

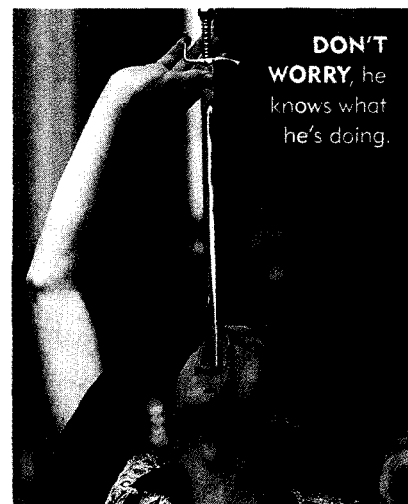
Average price of a character in EverQuest II



MEDICINE

Throats of Steel

Those who live by swallowing swords seldom die by them, according to a report jointly authored by a radiologist and a noted sword swallower. Surveying 33 sword swallowers, the authors find that many suffered occupational maladies, from soreness ("sword throat") to chest pain and perforations of the esophagus. (Especially harmful is a flourish called "The Drop," in which the performer places the sword in his mouth, releases it, and lets it plummet into his stomach.) Nearly half reported removing a blade to find it smudged with blood, or vomiting blood after a show. Sword swallowers rip their innards most when swallowing curved blades, when taking in multiple blades at once, or when distracted by audience members (or, in one case, by an unruly macaw). Yet they have an amazingly low rate of mortal injury: The medical literature lists not a single fatality. More curious still, sword-swallowing wounds tend to heal better than similar perforations inflicted

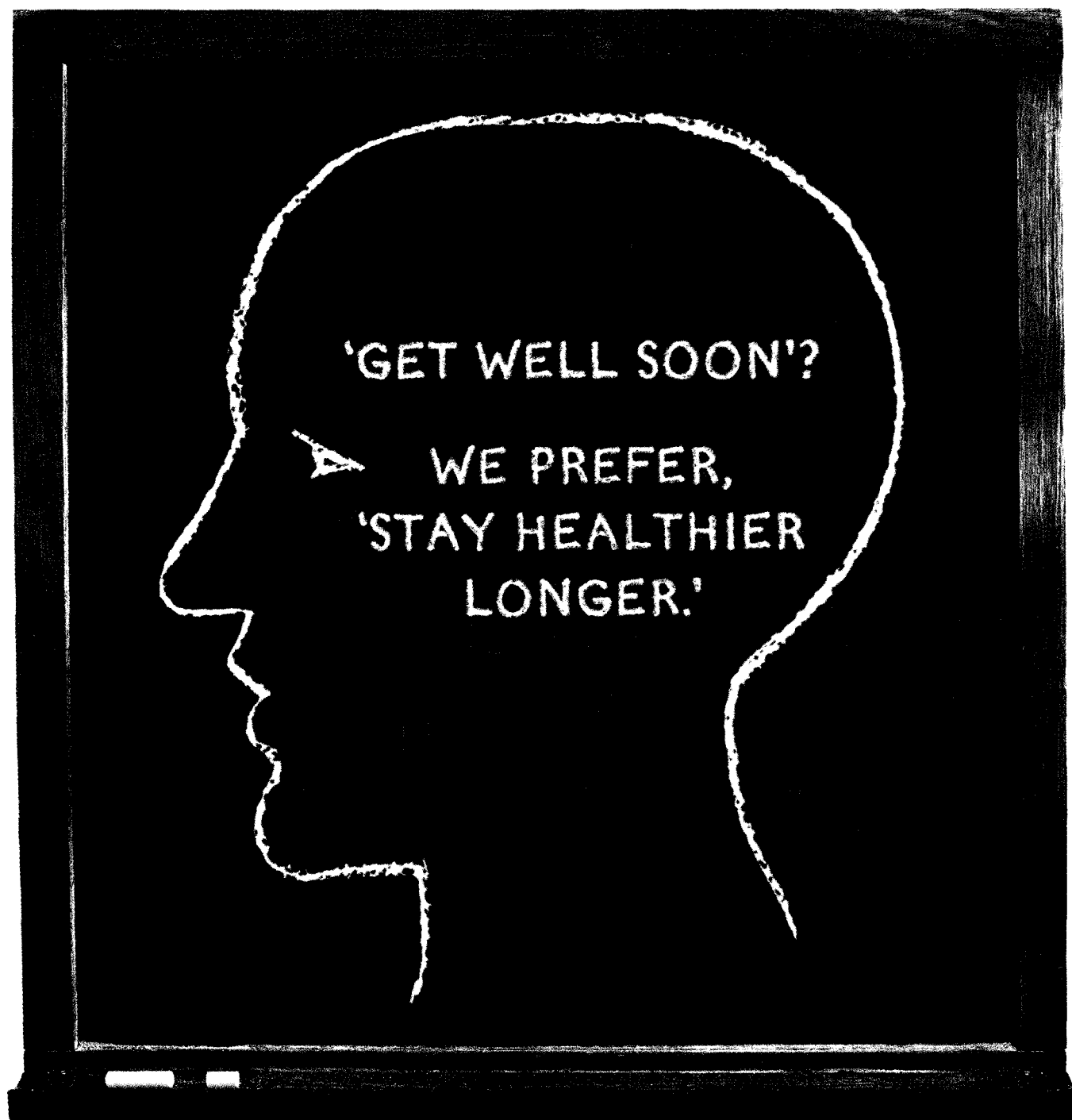


accidentally by doctors who insert scopes down their patients' throats.

—"Sword Swallowing and Its Side Effects," Brian Witcombe and Dan Meyer, British Medical Journal

For links to the documents discussed in this section, visit www.theatlantic.com/doc/200705/primarysources.

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THE WORLD IN NUMBERS

Serious trouble is brewing in Iraq's one quiet corner: the Kurdish north.

Breaking Away

BY GRAEME WOOD

With time, Arab Iraq is looking less and less like a country, and Kurdish Iraq is looking more and more like one. Since 2003, Kurdish negotiators have quietly compelled Baghdad to acknowledge the Kurdish parliament, ministries, and 100,000-strong peshmerga army—in effect, to let the Kurds be Kurds first and Iraqis second, if at all.

As a method for unmaking Iraq, patient political maneuvering has served the Kurds well—certainly better than the grisly carnival of fanaticism and killing that's taken place throughout the rest of the country. But the stately drift of Kurdistan away from the rest of Iraq may be nearing its end. The problem is one of territory.

The official border of Iraq's Kurdistan region roughly follows the outline of three Iraqi provinces (Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaimaniya) populated almost exclusively by Kurds. But it contains almost none of the Kurdish-majority territory extending into the adjacent Nineveh, Tamim, and Diyala provinces. At least in theory, the Kurds have engineered a political answer to this problem: The Iraqi constitution stipulates that these provinces may vote on whether to join the Kurdish region, if at least 10 percent of the residents of each province petition to do so. At a minimum, it appears that Tamim—the province centered on Kirkuk, which sits atop more than enough oil to support an independent Kurdish state—will vote this year on whether to join Kurdistan.

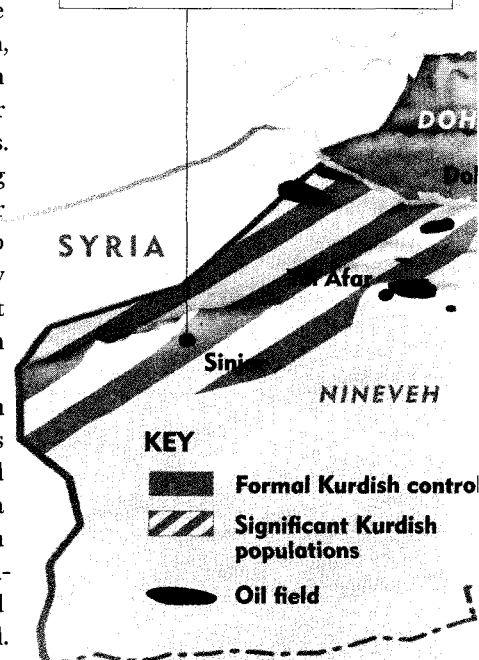
During the 1970s and '80s, Saddam Hussein forcibly removed thousands of Kurds from these disputed provinces. Arabs, generally from poor Shia areas in southern Iraq, replaced them, ensuring

Arab domination of oil-rich areas. Since 2003, tens of thousands of Kurds have washed back in—especially into Tamim, where many live in shantytowns on Kirkuk's outskirts, or in one of its soccer stadiums, which now houses hundreds. When the Iraqi constitution was being written in 2005, it was unclear whether returning Kurds would be permitted to vote in a referendum. In Tamim, it now looks certain that they will, and as a result Tamim will almost certainly tip Kurdish when the ballots are cast.

The redrawing of borders is seldom painless, and it is unlikely to proceed as quietly as other Kurdish steps toward independence—neither Sunnis nor Shia will react passively to a successful Kurdish referendum. The map to the right indicates the major flash points that could pit Kurd against Arab over land and oil. (The Iraqi constitution reserves existing oil fields for the central government, and the referendum in Tamim would not change that. But many observers look upon the enfeebled Baghdad government and believe that sanctioned Kurdish control of the lands above the oil would make the subsequent assertion of exclusive oil rights easier and more likely.)

Turkey has repeatedly threatened to invade Iraqi Kurdistan and seize Kirkuk to prevent an economically viable Kurdish state just south of Turkey's own restive Kurdish region. The threat is plausible—Turkish special forces have had a uniformed presence at a U.S. air base in Kirkuk, and more than 200,000 Turkish troops are deployed on the Kurdish border—but a Turkish invasion would also virtually guarantee insurrection and guerrilla warfare by Kurds in Turkey itself. In addition, Turkey would lose a

SINJAR A historically Kurdish city, Sinjar lies far outside the current bounds of the Kurdistan region. The Kurds will demand formal control, though, because many Kurdish leaders' families hail from here. (The Kurdistan Democratic Party currently administers the city, without Baghdad's blessing.) Arabs counter that Sinjar has been a mixed city for some time, and they suspect that Kurds covet the oil between Sinjar and Dohuk.



valuable trade partner; Turkish firms have invested heavily in northern Iraq.

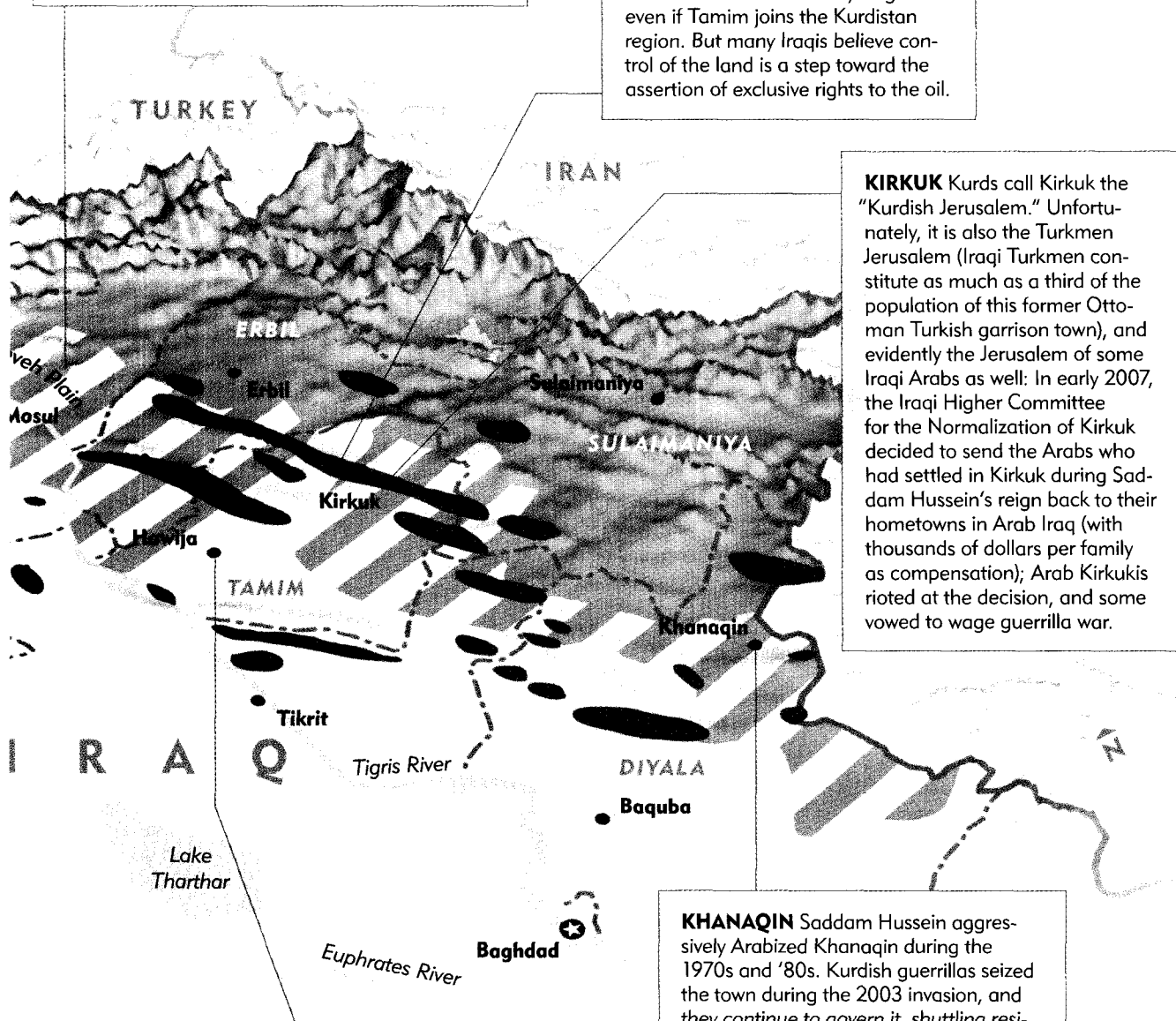
The Turkish threat is one reason many analysts doubt the Kurds will follow a legal territorial expansion with immediate secession. Still, timing is everything. If the Kurds wait too long to seek independence, their U.S. guarantors will have left, and Kurdistan will be completely at Turkey's mercy. And even if the Kurds do not intend a decisive break now, the violence and animosity that may surround the upcoming referendum could change that sentiment. Kurdish politicians note, much to their satisfaction, that the gears of liberation can be powered by politics or by force, as the situation warrants—and moreover, that since 1991 they have never turned in reverse. ▀

Graeme Wood is an Atlantic staff editor.

NINEVEH PLAIN Kurds and Arabs each claim the Nineveh Plain, but its majority is Assyrian Christian. Muslim Arabs in Mosul and Baghdad have targeted this sect for annihilation; the Kurds have provided security to its adherents, but Assyrians worry that Kurdish generosity is a prelude to annexation—and a future of second-class citizenship.

TAMIM OIL FIELDS About 40 percent of Iraq's oil reserves are near Kirkuk. Legally, oil from these fields would still be controlled by Baghdad even if Tamim joins the Kurdistan region. But many Iraqis believe control of the land is a step toward the assertion of exclusive rights to the oil.

KIRKUK Kurds call Kirkuk the "Kurdish Jerusalem." Unfortunately, it is also the Turkmen Jerusalem (Iraqi Turkmen constitute as much as a third of the population of this former Ottoman Turkish garrison town), and evidently the Jerusalem of some Iraqi Arabs as well: In early 2007, the Iraqi Higher Committee for the Normalization of Kirkuk decided to send the Arabs who had settled in Kirkuk during Saddam Hussein's reign back to their hometowns in Arab Iraq (with thousands of dollars per family as compensation); Arab Kirkukis rioted at the decision, and some vowed to wage guerrilla war.



HAWIJA. Mostly unpopulated before the discovery of oil in the 1920s and '30s, Hawija is a distinctly Arab city in a Kurdish-majority province. When Tamim province votes Kurdish, thousands of Arabs and Turkmen will end up as unwilling passengers on the Kurdish ride to independence. Rather than acquiesce to Kurdish suzerainty, fringe areas are likely to appeal for annexation by their Arab neighbors.

KHANAQIN Saddam Hussein aggressively Arabized Khanaqin during the 1970s and '80s. Kurdish guerrillas seized the town during the 2003 invasion, and they continue to govern it, shuttling residents back in to re-tip the balance toward a Kurdish majority. The Kurdish government has already sold oil-exploration concessions near Khanaqin to a Canadian company. The town also carries the prize of the Mundhiriya border crossing with Iran, a source of tax revenue.



A SMOKING GUN? Recent evidence of Iran's support for militant Iraqis, according to the U.S. government

POLL

IRAN IN IRAQ

The Atlantic recently asked a group of foreign-policy authorities about Iran's role in the Iraq conflict.

Q: Does the Bush administration's public assessment of Iran's involvement in the insurgency and sectarian violence in Iraq overstate Iran's role, understate it, or get it about right?

48% OVERSTATES

"Iran is playing a role, but so are others. There is little doubt that funds are flowing from Saudi Arabia in support of the Sunni insurgency, which has claimed the greatest number of Iraqi lives and American troops. There are many bad actors, and we need to sustain attention on all of them—and we need to talk to all of them as well."

"The fundamental problem in Iraq isn't Iran (or Syria, for that matter), but the fact that the U.S. invasion opened up a Pandora's box of sectarian tensions. The result is the civil war we are now witnessing. And it shouldn't be surprising that sectarian factions will look for financial, material, and moral support from wherever they can get it. For many Shiites, that means Iran."

"It doesn't so much overstate Iran's role as it belatedly calls attention to something that has existed for at least the past three years. The question is whether [Iranian intervention is now any] worse (I suspect it isn't)—and, if not, why are we [now] paying such febrile attention to it?"

40% GETS IT ABOUT RIGHT

"Iran isn't the main problem in Iraq, but it is certainly a contributing factor, and it's about time the administration made a bigger public complaint about Iran's undeclared war on the United States and on Iraqi democrats."

"[About right,] but the administration has further injured the U.S. standing in the region by talking as if Iran was ascendant and the U.S. on the run. The fact is, Iran is a poor and divided country whose power is only a small fraction of ours."

12% UNDERSTATES

"The administration has been focusing primarily on the presence of Iranian arms in Iraq, perhaps overstating how much centralized control Iran has on the transfer of weapons. But it has understated Iran's political influence, which is quite substantial due to long-standing ties to clerics and Shiite militias."

Q: Would a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq within the next year help or hinder Iran's objectives in the region?

59% HELP

"It will help [Iran's] objectives, if it does not trigger a major reaction from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. If it does trigger that reaction, it will hinder Iran's objectives."

"America fought Iraq, and Iran won."

41% HINDER

"It will hinder more than help. Right now this is a freebie for Iran. We protect a pro-Iranian Iraqi government, and our troop commitment ties us down. As we withdraw, the parties in Iraq will need to accommodate each other more, which might check Iranian influence. And Iran will have to deal with the regional opposition to its attempts to dominate Iraq."

"It would release us ... from the entanglement that Iran has taken such tremendous satisfaction from finding us in, [and also] likely result in ... Iran being sucked into and becoming stuck in the Iraq morass much as we have been."

PARTICIPANTS (43): Kenneth Adelman, Graham Allison, Ronald Asmus, Samuel Berger, Daniel Blumenthal, Max Boot, Stephen Bosworth, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Daniel Byman, Wesley Clark, Richard Clarke, William Cohen, Ivo Daalder, Douglas Feith, Jay Garner, Leslie Gelb, Marc Grossman, John Hamre, Gary Hart, Bruce Hoffman, John Hulsman, Robert Hunter, Tony Judt, Robert Kagan, David Kay, Andrew Krepinevich, Charles Kupchan, John Lehman, James Lindsay, Edward Luttwak, Jessica Mathews, John McLaughlin, Richard Myers, William Nash, Joseph Nye, Carlos Pascual, Thomas Pickering, Kenneth Pollack, Joseph Ralston, Susan Rice, Wendy Sherman, Anne-Marie Slaughter, James Steinberg. Not all participants answered both questions.

Some think
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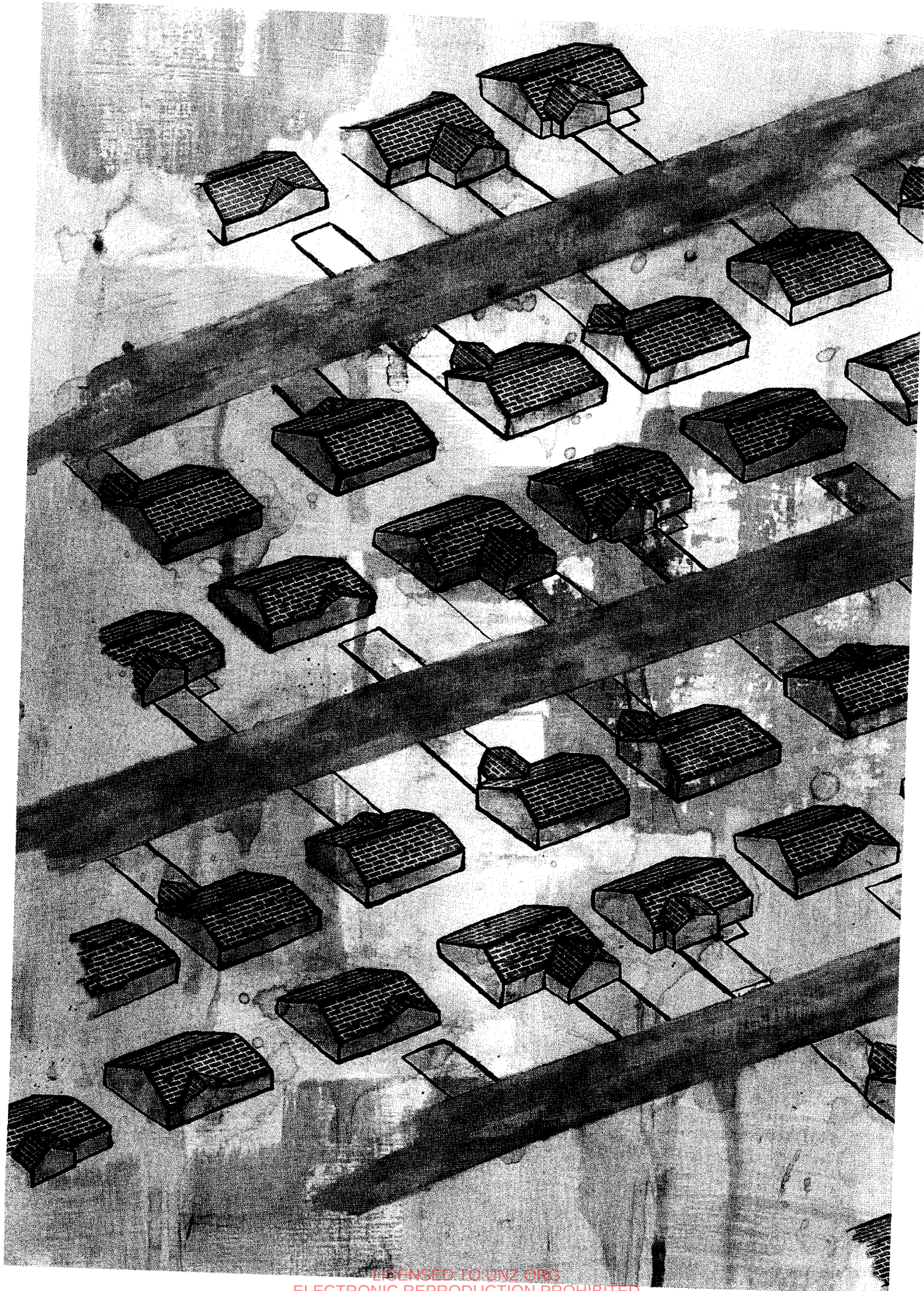
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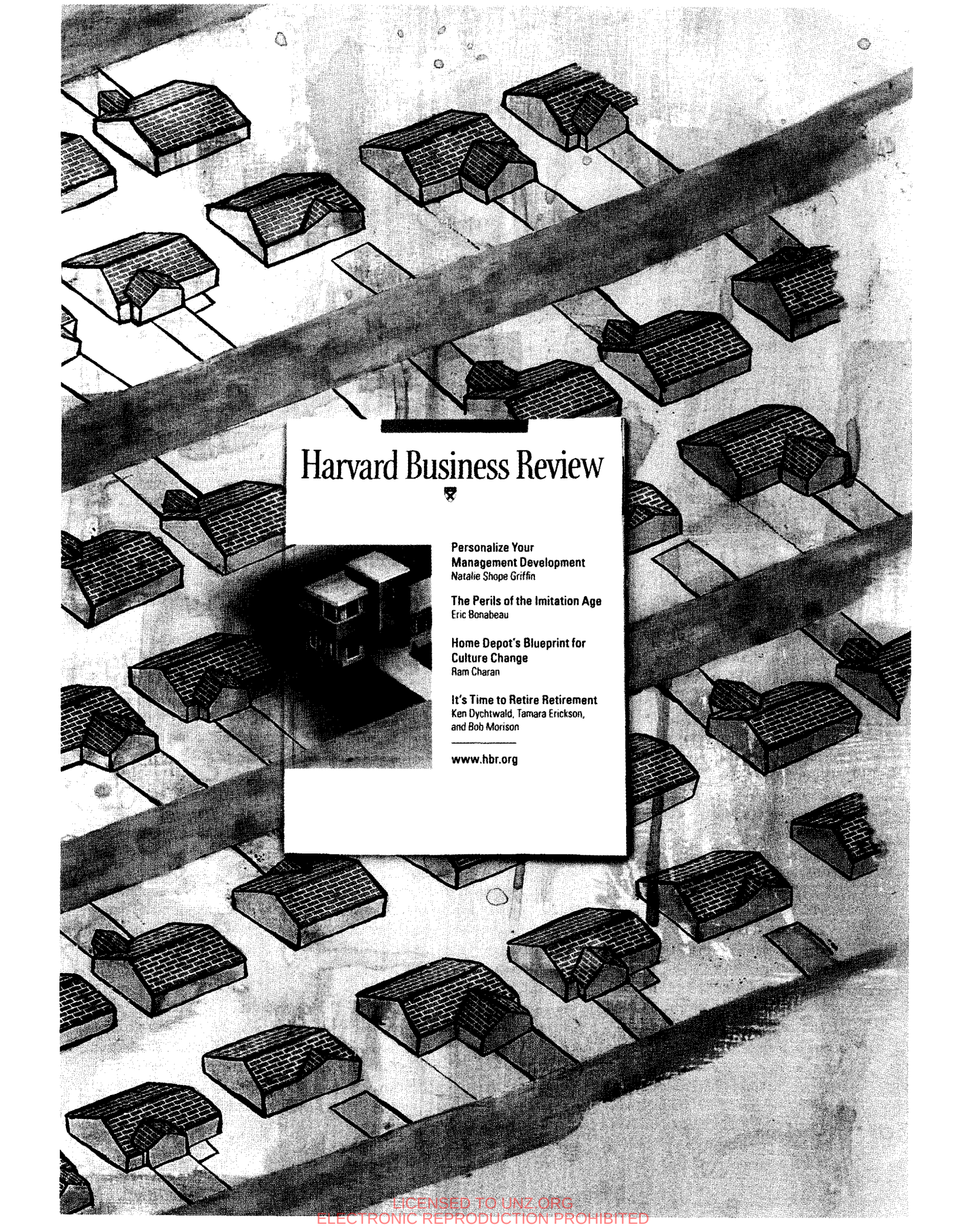
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WASHINGTON

What role will Hillary's husband play in the campaign?

Running Mate

BY MARC AMBINDER

One of the juicier subplots of the 2008 presidential campaign—so juicy that it could be upgraded to full-fledged plot status at a moment's notice—is the role that Bill Clinton will play. Will he disappear into the background, ceding center stage to his wife? Or will he reclaim the spotlight, seeking to remind war-weary Americans of better times? And if he does, will his personal history threaten his wife's candidacy?

Clinton hopes to remain a subplot, rather than the big story. That's why, at his prompting, researchers at his presidential library and his offices in Harlem embarked on a highly secretive two-year project: investigating their own boss.

The team conducted a painstaking reexamination of all the well-worn issues from Clinton's presidency, poring over trial transcripts, internal White House documents, notes, and public and private correspondence, searching for any overlooked information that could be used to give new life to old embarrassments. Perhaps more important, the researchers covered Clinton's postpresidential history too, with a muckraker's eye, including the rumors about his private life that inevitably trail him.

All but a handful of Clinton's staff and friends were kept in the dark about the vetting process, though two who did know about it confirmed its existence to me. Neither would describe how the results were disseminated or who has access to them now. But the purpose of the exercise is clear enough: Bill Clinton wants to know what everybody else could know about Bill Clinton. Knowing that, we can safely conclude this, too: Bill Clinton hopes to play a major role in his wife's campaign.

But will he? The issue of the spousal role in a Clinton presidential run has come up before. During his first campaign, Bill Clinton routinely invoked his wife, joking that voters would get "two for one" if they elected him. Hillary Rodham Clinton, the candidate signaled, would be a coequal partner.

It didn't occur to anyone—at least not soon enough—that the public might not *want* a (half-elected) partnership running the country. The downside of such an arrangement became apparent soon after Bill Clinton won the White House. When health-care reform—his wife's high-profile charge—collapsed, the two-for-one deal became costly, weighing down his presidency.

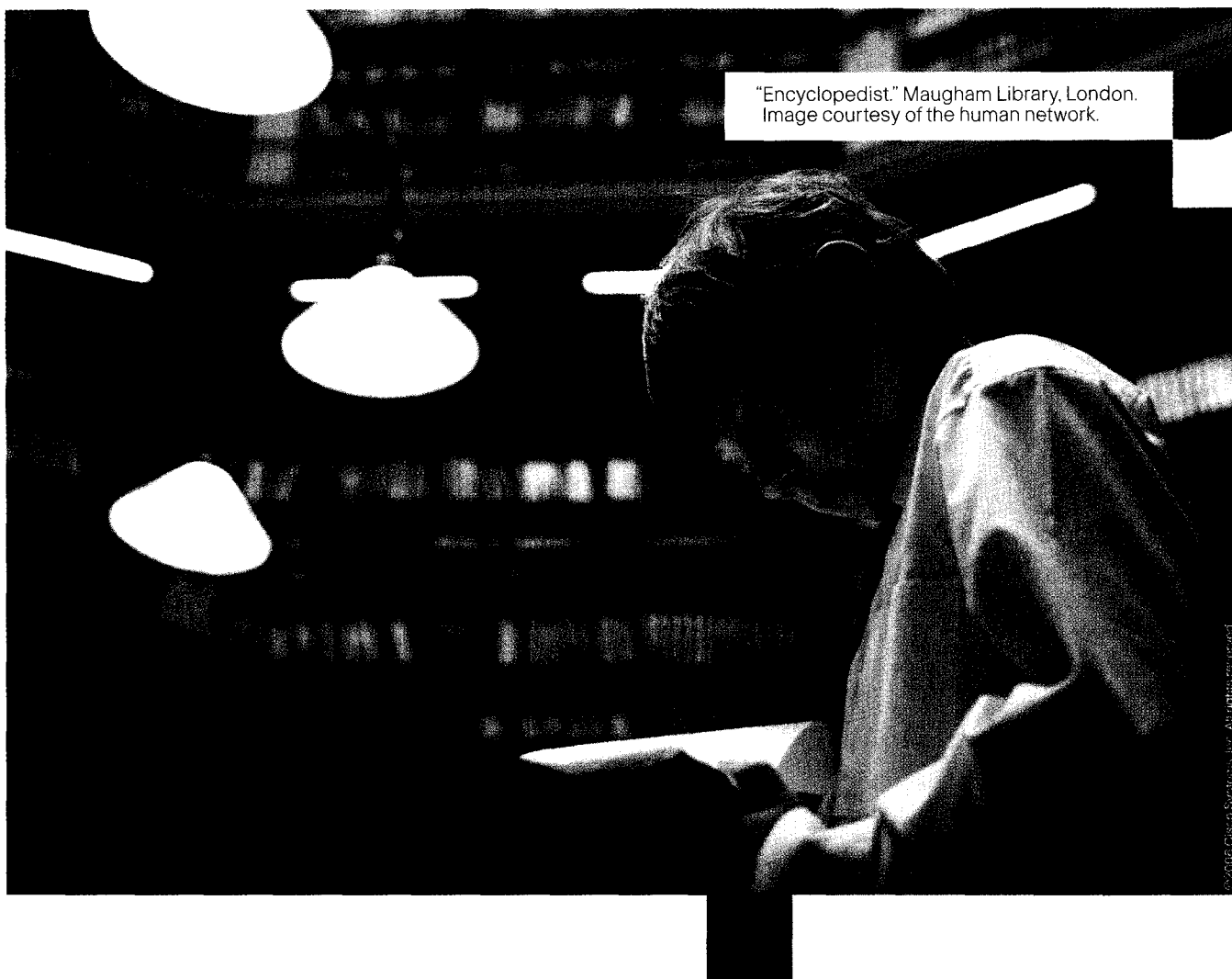
To her credit, Hillary Clinton endured that ordeal—and the many others that followed. Her husband's approval ratings when he left office were the highest of any president since the end of World War II. Not nearly as well appreciated is the fact that hers were almost as impressive: When she left the White House, 60 percent of the electorate believed she'd performed well as first lady, and, perhaps more striking in light of the early controversy, 62 percent expressed no reservations about her role formulating policy for her husband.

With First Lady Clinton now Senator Clinton and the front-runner for the Democratic nomination, she faces the same choice her husband once did: Will hers be a "modern" political marriage that reprises his two-for-one pitch or a traditional one that features the spouse in a position of deference, to be seen but not heard? (No one close to the Clintons has any

doubt that Bill, for a host of reasons, will comply with his wife's wishes, whatever they may be.)

There are plenty of models for a first gentleman, but you have to look overseas to find them. Joachim Sauer, the husband of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, tends toward anonymity, which has earned him the nickname "The Phantom of the Opera" because he shows up with his wife only at musical performances. Denis Thatcher, husband of Margaret, was seemingly unbothered by the teasing that resulted from his position and from his penchants for golf and gin. At the other end of the spectrum is Park Sung Jun, the husband of South Korean Prime Minister Han Myeong Sook; both husband and wife are famous pro-democracy activists—but he more than she, for having spent 13 years in prison. (Say what you will about Bill Clinton, but his dossier is prison-free.) And Eva Perón presents the classic case of a spouse thoroughly overshadowing a president throughout the presidency.

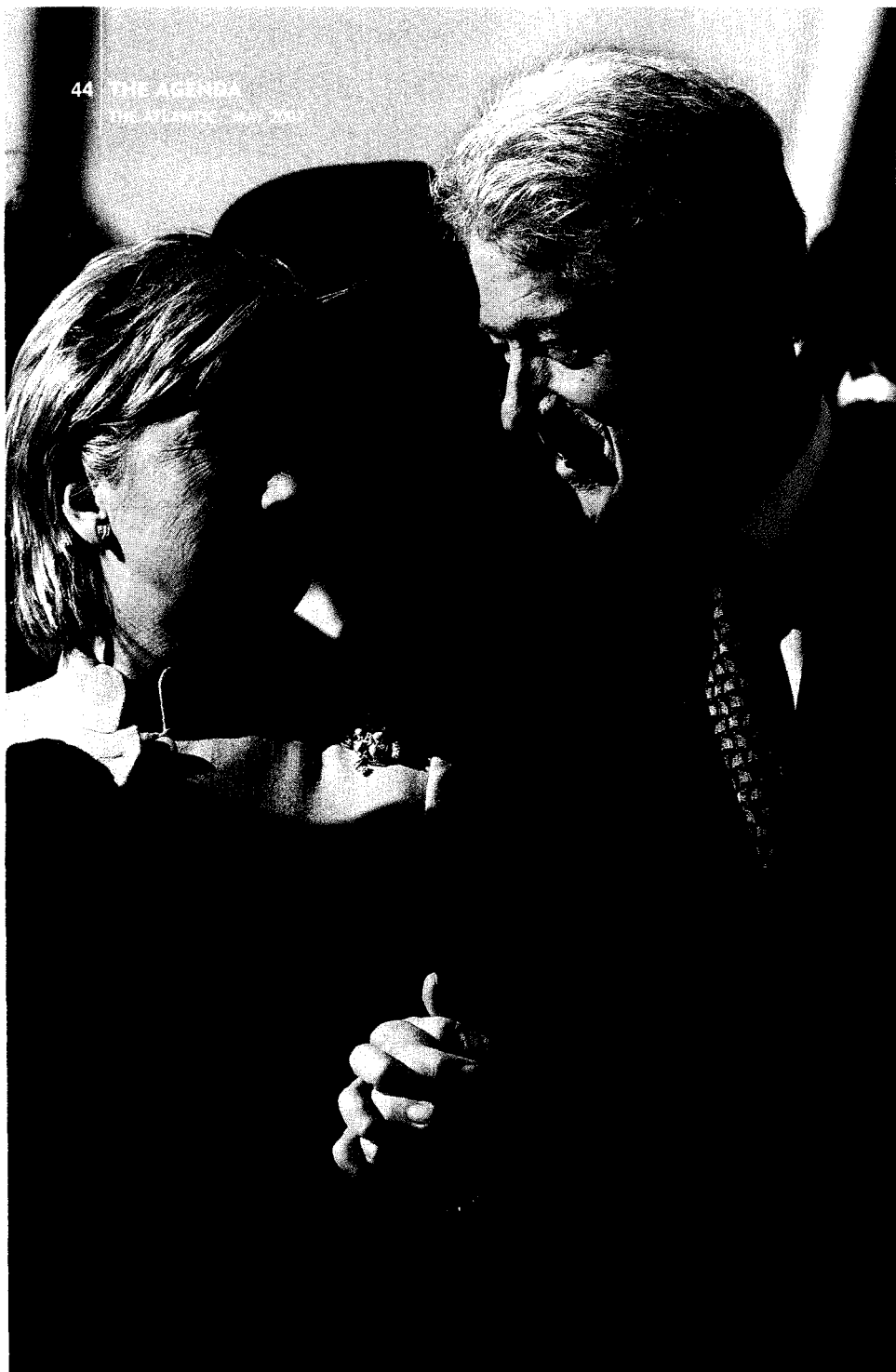
The Kremlinology of the Clinton political universe is forever murky and subject to interpretation. The signs at this point, however, suggest that Hillary Clinton and her husband have different ideas about what he'll do. Perhaps more telling than Bill Clinton's self-investigation is a subsidiary detail: He also asked his staffers to compile an exhaustive list of his achievements, which must be about as close to the creation of a résumé as ex-presidents get, and betrays a longing to return to the presidential campaign trail that Al Gore overcautiously denied him. But so far his wife, too, has played it safe and kept



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SEE BILL RUN: the former president, more seen than heard from, in Selma, Alabama.

him in a traditional spousal role, or as much of one as a popular former president can assume.

Bill Clinton, initially a vocal champion of his wife's presidential chops, has said next to nothing to the press since Hillary announced her candidacy in January. His advisers say he has deliberately taken a hands-off approach to her campaign and ordered his staff to defer to hers. With the 2008 campaign well under way, he has spent most of his time writing a book about citizen activism,

delivering paid speeches to private audiences, and tending to his foundation.

Still, Hillary Clinton cannot entirely ignore the benefit of his appeal. The former president regularly hosts private fund-raisers for her campaign and sends blast e-mails soliciting money. He also acts as surrogate in chief when she's unable to attend important events. And like a chef who prepares a special recipe on important occasions, Hillary Clinton will sometimes invoke her husband's name and legacy. In February, speaking

before largely black audiences on her first campaign swing through South Carolina, she referred to him no fewer than six times, drawing applause at the mention of his name. And he was prominently displayed (though he did not speak at her events) during her recent trip to Selma, Alabama, to commemorate the civil-rights movement.

Surprisingly enough, when husband and wife do talk publicly about the first Clinton administration, they don't hesitate to discuss, at least indirectly, the scandal over the president's marital infidelity—or, more precisely, the *reaction* to the scandal. As Bill Clinton wrote in a recent fund-raising pitch:

During eight years in the White House, Hillary and I faced a constant barrage of attacks from Washington Republicans. No insult was off-limits. No tactic was too low. They threw everything they could at us—but we beat them time and time again.

Likewise, Hillary Clinton's oft-repeated justification for her candidacy—"Bill and I know how to beat [Republicans], and we have consistently"—is nothing if not an allusion to surviving her husband's impeachment. Both Clintons try to use the memory of the Republican overreaction to the scandal to reignite liberal outrage, while simultaneously trying to prevent that scandal from overshadowing the current campaign by sequestering the man at the center of it. It's a classic Clintonian straddle.

The irony of it all is that if the polls are to be believed—and if Bill Clinton's elaborate self-examination didn't turn up anything new—this tortured orchestration is unnecessary. And if you look closely, an answer to Hillary's conundrum can be found right there in the numbers, too. Of those who think she would not make a good president, a recent Gallup/*USA Today* poll found that only 11 percent cite her husband as the reason. But of those who think she would, nearly half laud her experience, most of it gained in his administration, suggesting that "two for one" might be an attractive offer after all. ▀

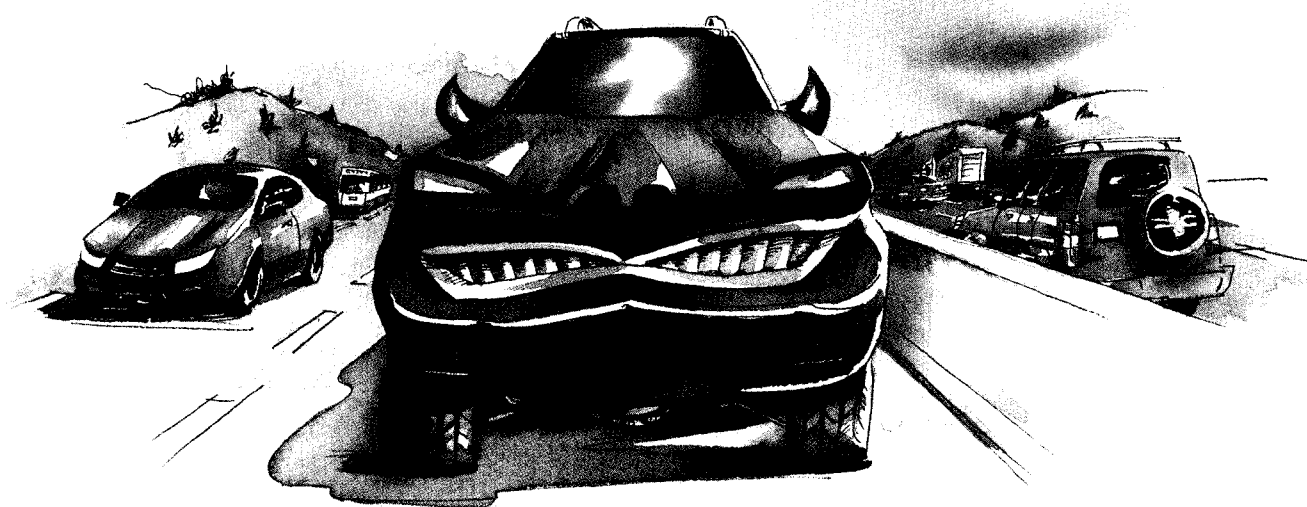
Marc Ambinder is an associate editor of *The Hotline*.

BROOKS KRAFT

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FIRST PRINCIPLES

The age of the dollar has been great for America—but it may end soon.

When the Buck Stops

BY CLIVE CROOK

On a trip to Guangzhou, China, in the early 1990s, I couldn't help but notice that the accessory of the moment for stylish young men was a cell-phone holster. In those days, a typical holster only sometimes contained an actual cell phone—but it almost always contained a dollar bill, tucked behind the plastic window, folded carefully so that George Washington could gaze out on capitalism with Chinese characteristics.

U.S. greenbacks may not be fashion statements in many places (I doubt they're hip in Guangzhou any longer), but almost wherever you travel, people are glad to accept foreign cash so long as it bears the graven image of an American president.

The dollar's status as *the* global currency confers more advantages on the United States and its citizens than you might think—advantages far beyond convenience for international travelers (though let us not underestimate that). The dollar's popularity has moved real resources from the rest of the world to the United States. And on a much larger scale, through an economic sleight of hand in global financial markets, it has allowed the country to sustain an otherwise impossible standard of living. These wonderful tricks, unfortunately, may not work much longer. When they start to fail, as they eventually must, the dollar's peculiar global role will suddenly become a focus of attention. You don't know what you've got till it's gone.

There is a difference—known as seigniorage—between what dollar bills cost to manufacture (pennies) and what those same dollar bills can buy once they're in circulation. The government does not distribute dollars by

dropping them from helicopters; in effect, it spends them on things such as hours worked or goods procured. Merely by printing a dollar bill, the government grants itself a claim on a dollar's worth of real things.

Essentially, the Chinese youth sporting a dollar bill on his belt has surrendered in exchange—possibly through a long chain of intermediaries—a dollar's worth of real stuff to the United States. The more people there are around the world who are willing to hold the currency that America prints, and the greater the quantity of dollars they wish to keep, the larger this transfer of real wealth will be. So it matters to the United States that your cab driver in São Paulo is pleased to accept dollars, or that your cocaine connection in Medellín actually prefers greenbacks to pesos. When those deals go down, we all get a piece of the action.

Altogether some \$750 billion in paper money and coins is in circulation today, and most of that is reckoned to be held abroad. As they say where I come from, that's a nice little earner. Alas, the connection to crime is apparent: Even nowadays, crime is a cash business, comparatively speaking, and a portable, reliable, and above all anonymous store of value has great utility if you are up to no good. No one knows for sure, but I'd guess most of the \$100 notes in circulation (the largest denomination currently issued) are oiling the wheels of criminal enterprise. The European Union clearly wants a share of the international seigniorage business for its currency, and it has issued 500-euro notes (worth around \$660 each) to secure its competitive advantage in the sector. One wonders—the European Central Bank hasn't said—

what legal transactions require notes of that denomination. Even in Frankfurt, cab fare rarely runs that high.

Valuable though it is, however, the seigniorage that the United States captures from abroad is small beer compared with the rewards that accrue to the country from the dollar's standing in global capital markets. In dealings with foreigners, it is good to be able to transact in one's own currency. Let the other guy—the foreign customer or supplier—cope with the accounting complications and carry the exchange-rate risk. Should you need to borrow abroad, it is especially good to be able to do it in your own currency.

And, my word, how America needs to borrow abroad. The country's current-account deficit exceeds 6 percent of the gross domestic product and looks likely to continue to grow. This deficit—the gap, roughly, between what the country buys from foreigners and what it sells to them—has to be financed by borrowing. The United States, to draw an admittedly imperfect analogy with households, is adding to its overdraft each year, to the tune of more than 6 percent of its income. In the recent past, countries that have borrowed so heavily have sooner or later suffered financial collapse—think of the Latin American debt crisis of the 1980s, or the East Asian financial meltdown of the late 1990s. So how can the United States sustain such borrowing with little apparent strain? Well, those earlier financial breakdowns were also exchange-rate crises. When the Thai baht collapsed, the domestic-currency burden of Thailand's foreign-currency debts soared, flattening the economy. Should the dollar collapse, the



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domestic-currency burden of U.S. foreign debts will hardly change, because the United States has borrowed in dollars, not in its creditors' currencies. If the dollar does crash, the foreign creditors will get screwed first.

In other words, the United States can cheerfully borrow at this extraordinary rate—and thus absorb, year after year, more resources than it produces,

this effect, *increasing* the dollar value of America's foreign assets (selling them would now yield more dollars), while leaving the value of all those dollar-denominated debts unchanged. With apologies to George Soros, call this the alchemy of finance: The United States has found a way to borrow that adds almost nothing to its debts. And it's mostly thanks to the dollar's status.

central-bank dollar reserves is a consequence of its desire to keep the dollar dearer—and its own currency cheaper—than it otherwise would be. And that desire, in turn, is fed by China's wish to keep its exports competitive and its workforce employed. But this cannot go on indefinitely. Recent signs suggest that the bank is already starting to diversify its reserves away from dollars. And there are intimations of a more liberal exchange-rate regime.

All kinds of economic forces are nibbling at the dollar's reserve-currency status. The euro is one factor; Asia's economic emergence is another; improving financial technology (for a host of arcane reasons) is a third. More and more, the world will move toward a system where many currencies share in that status, and in the benefits it confers. That's quite unfortunate for the United States, but it need not be disastrous. Still, if it happens too abruptly, the inevitable unraveling of the weird financial bargain that the United States and China have struck could be scary. If the People's Bank dumps its dollars, and the dollar collapses, America itself might not become insolvent—but it would have a serious inflation problem to deal with, its interest rates would have to rise, and a lot of overindebted American families might go bust.

No question, the United States is going to need China's cooperation in managing this disentanglement smoothly. What will be interesting to see is how much, geopolitically speaking, China will extract in return. As the dollar becomes less special, the euro continues to catch on, and the rupee and the renminbi become international currencies, China will gain full and equal access to the positions of global economic leadership it so evidently craves. In the end, that would have happened anyway, but America's overexuberant exploitation of the dollar's standing has handed China a great political asset. This will surely be cashed in for a very good seat at the economic table—and, we are likely to find, for other prizes besides. ▀

Clive Crook is an Atlantic senior editor.



all without arousing alarm in financial markets or having to pay punitive rates of interest on its debt—in part because of the dollar's global eminence.

But there's still more. As I said, the household analogy is imperfect. A family whose spending persistently exceeded its income would see its debts mount. America's net debt is barely rising in relation to national income, despite the massive borrowing. Why? One reason is that while America pays a very low rate of interest on its debts, which are mostly in the form of Treasury securities, it receives a very high rate of return on its foreign assets, which mostly represent ownership stakes in foreign companies. This return offsets some of the borrowing. Furthermore, the dollar's gentle decline in recent years has magnified

One question, though: Who are these financial geniuses placing themselves so reliably on the losing side of these transactions? Who are these people lending hundreds of billions of dollars to the United States and getting less than nothing as their rate of return? Funny you should ask. Maybe, in the bowels of the People's Bank of China, there are officials who 15 years ago were flashing portraits of George Washington in the markets of Guangzhou: *Somebody* in that institution has been wrestling with a bad case of raging dollar-lust. In recent years, Asian central banks, with China's in the lead, have supplied—at a loss—most of the foreign credit that has kept the American economy going.

They have their reasons, of course. China's enormous accumulation of

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150 YEARS OF THE ATLANTIC

This is the 15th in a series of archival excerpts in honor of the magazine's 150th anniversary.

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Humor

NOTES ON AN IDLE EXCURSION

January 1878

BY MARK TWAIN

As part of a four-installment travel series, Mark Twain shared his thoughts on the island of Bermuda.

The early twilight of a Sunday evening in Hamilton, Bermuda, is an alluring time. There is just enough of whispering breeze, fragrance of flowers, and sense of repose to raise one's thoughts heavenward; and just enough amateur piano music to keep him reminded of the other place ...

We never met a man, or woman, or child anywhere in this sunny island who seemed to be unprosperous, or discontented, or sorry about anything. This sort of monotony became very tiresome presently, and even something worse. The spectacle of an entire nation groveling in contentment is an infuriating thing ...

The Bermudians are hoping soon to have telegraphic communication with the world. But even after they shall have acquired this curse it will still be a good country to go to for a vacation, for there are charming little islets scattered about the inclosed sea where one could live secure from interruption. The telegraph boy would have to come in a boat, and one could easily kill him while he was making his landing.

Vol. 41, No. 243, pp. 12-19

DER ARME DOLMETSCHER

July 1955

BY KURT VONNEGUT JR.

In 1955, Kurt Vonnegut, then a General Electric employee and an aspiring novelist, recalled an episode from his Army days.

I was astonished one day in 1944, in the midst of front-line hell-raising, to learn that I had been made interpreter, *Dolmetscher* if you please, for a whole battalion ...

It had never entered my head that I had what it took to dolmetsch ... While a student, I had learned the first stanza of *Die Lorelei* by rote from a college roommate, and I happened to give those lines a dogged rendition while working within earshot of the battalion commander ...

Two hours later, the company clerk told me to lay down the buckets, for I was now battalion interpreter.

Orders to move up came soon after. Those in authority were too harried to hear my declarations of incompetence. "You talk Kraut good enough foah us," said the executive officer. "Theah ain't goin' to be much talkin' to Krauts where we're goin'" ...

One [soldier] handed me a pamphlet purporting to make German easy for the man in the foxhole.

"Some of the first pages are missing," the donor explained ... "Used 'em for cigarette papers," he said ...

I examined each of [the pamphlet's] precious pages in turn, delighted by the simplicity of transposing English into German. With this booklet, all I had to do was to run my finger down the left-hand column until I found the English phrase I wanted, and then rattle off the nonsense syllables printed opposite in the right-hand column. "How many grenade launchers have you?" for instance, was *Vee feel grenada vairfair habben zee?* Impeccable German for "Where are your tank columns?" proved to be nothing more troublesome than *Vo zint cara pantzer shpitzen?* I mouthed the phrases: "Where are your howitzers? How many machine guns have you? Surrender! Don't shoot! Where have you hidden your motorcycle? Hands up! What unit are you from?"

The pamphlet came to an abrupt end, toppling my spirits from manic to depressive. [The pamphlet's donor] had smoked up ... the pamphlet's first half, leaving me with nothing to work with but the repartee of hand-to-hand fighting ...

Twenty minutes later ... four Tiger tanks drove up to the front door of Headquarters, and two dozen German infantrymen dismounted to round us up with submachine guns.

"Say sumpin'," ordered the colonel, spunky to the last.

I ran my eye down the left-hand columns of my pamphlet until I found the phrase which most fairly represented our sentiments.

"Don't shoot," I said.

A German tank officer swaggered in to have a look at his catch. In his hand was a pamphlet, somewhat smaller than mine.

"Where are your howitzers?" he said.

Vol. 196, No. 1, pp. 86-88

THE PORCUPINES IN THE ARTICHOKEs

October 1959

BY JAMES THURBER

James Thurber offered advice to those in the unfortunate position of having to entertain writers at dinner.

"I have writers the way other people have mice," a disturbed hostess has written me. "What can I do to keep them from arguing, fighting, and throwing highball glasses after dinner? One doesn't dare mention names, such as Herman Melville and Harold Loeb, or the fight is on. What would you suggest?"

Well, now, it isn't easy to entertain writers and have any fun. You might begin by saying, over the first cocktail, "I don't want any writers to be mentioned this evening." Do not make the mistake of adding, "From Washington Irving to Jack Kerouac," because that would instantly precipitate an argument about Washington Irving and Jack Kerouac. You might begin by saying, "The porcupines are getting our artichokes." This could, of course, lead to literary wrangling and jangling, but everything is a calculated risk when writers are present, even "My grandfather almost married a Pawnee woman," or "I wonder if you gentlemen would help me put the handle back on my icebox." A writer, of course, can turn anything at all into a literary discussion, and it might be better not to say anything about anything ...

My wife, during a party in August, when writers are at their worst, brought out the pencils and paper and said, "I want you all to write down the names of as many animals and birds as you can think of with a double 'o' in their names."

This worked fine for about half an hour, during which the literary men wrote down: moose, goose, mongoose, raccoon, baboon ...

The trouble started, as my wife should have known it would, when the papers were gathered up and the scoring began ...

There are always two or three writers, in this kind of game, who deliberately louse things up by taking and holding an untenable position. One of these obstinate fellows had written down pool shark, and another had come up with booze hound ...

All of a moment a whooping literary argument was on. It concerned the merits and demerits of Rupert Brooke, Stephen Crane, Tennyson's "The Brook" and Tennyson himself, Hart Crane, and Bret Harte; also *The Heart of the Matter*, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, and *The Death of the Heart*, thus involving Graham Greene, Carson McCullers ...

That night three highball glasses, two friendships, and a woman's heart were broken. There is really only one safe rule for a hostess to go by. Do not ask writers to your house, especially in the summer, and in three other seasons of the year—spring, autumn, and winter.

Vol. 204, No. 4, pp. 35-37

LAWS CONCERNING FOOD AND DRINK; HOUSEHOLD PRINCIPLES; LAMENTATIONS OF THE FATHER

February 1997

BY IAN FRAZIER

In a 1997 manifesto, Ian Frazier, author and father of two, laid down the law on behalf of fathers everywhere.

Of the beasts of the field, and of the fishes of the sea, and of all foods that are acceptable in my sight you may eat, but not in the living room.

Of the hoofed animals, broiled or ground into burgers, you may eat, but not in the living room. Of the cloven-hoofed animal, plain or with cheese, you may eat, but not in the living room. Of the cereal grains, of the corn and of the wheat and of the oats, and of all the cereals that are of bright color and unknown provenance you may eat, but not in the living room. Of the quiescently frozen dessert and of all frozen after-meal treats you may eat, but absolutely not in the living room. Of the juices and other beverages, yes, even of those in sippy-cups, you may drink, but not in the living room, neither may you carry such therein. Indeed, when you reach the place where the living room carpet begins, of any food or beverage there you may not eat, neither may you drink.

But if you are sick, and are lying down and watching something, then may you eat in the living room.

And if you are seated in your high chair, or in a chair such as a greater person might use, keep your legs and feet below you as they were. Neither raise up your knees, nor place your feet upon the table, for that is an abomination to me. Yes, even when you have an interesting bandage to show, your feet upon the table are an abomination, and worthy of rebuke. Drink your milk as it is given you, neither use on it any utensils, nor fork, nor knife, nor spoon, for that is not what they are for; if you will dip your blocks in the milk, and lick it off, you will be sent away. When you have drunk, let the empty cup then remain upon the table, and do not bite it upon its edge and by your teeth hold it to your face in order to make noises in it sounding like a duck; for you will be sent away ...

Sit just as I have told you, and do not lean to one side or the other, nor slide down until you are nearly slid away. Heed me; for if you sit like that, your hair will go into the syrup. And now behold, even as I have said, it has come to pass.

Vol. 279, No. 2, pp. 89-90



GM Gave Me A Mission To Mars

My name is Gerry Voeck. At GM, I worked on developing the technology that helped guide the Viking mission to Mars. Landing on the surface of Mars in 1975 forever changed how we view the universe. I think what GM is doing today will as well. GM's scientists have built the world's first drivable fuel cell by-wire vehicle — a high performance hydrogen propulsion system that emits only clean water vapor. Imagine that! GM is working toward cutting our dependence on petroleum, reducing emissions to nothing, and building a better performing, more powerful vehicle than ever before. Now that's an Earth shattering idea.

Gerry Voeck

Only



The inside story of how the interrogators of Task Force 145 cracked Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's inner circle—without resorting to torture—and hunted down al-Qaeda's man in Iraq

BY MARK BOWDEN

THE PLOY

It was a macabre moment of triumph. At a closed compound within Balad Air Base in Iraq, behind Jersey barriers 30 feet high, the men and women of the interrogation mill crowded around a stark display: two freshly dead men, bare and supine on the floor. ¶ The audience members were expert interrogators,»

most of them young, some of them military, others civilian contract workers. They called themselves “gators,” and they were the intelligence arm of Task Force 145, the clandestine unit of Delta Force operators and Navy SEALs who hunt down America’s most-wanted terrorists. For years, their primary target had been Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian leader of the grandly named Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, the gloating, murderous author of assassinations, roadside bombings, and suicide attacks. Together, living and working inside this “Battlefield Interrogation Facility,” the gators had produced leads for the Task Force to chase. They had put in thousands of hours probing, threatening, flattering, browbeating, wheedling, conning, and questioning, doing what Major General William B. Caldwell IV, in his press conference the next day, would call “painstaking intelligence gathering from local sources and from within Zarqawi’s network.” It was, as Caldwell would put it, “the slow, deliberate exploitation of leads and opportunities, person to person,” all striving to answer just one critical question: Where is Zarqawi *right now*?

This day, June 7, 2006, had finally produced the answer.

And so here he was, stretched out on the floor, stiff, pale, gray, and swollen in death, his “spiritual adviser,” Sheikh al-Rahman, lying alongside him. The men had been killed, along with two women and two small children, when an American F-16 had steered first one and then another 500-pound bomb into the house they occupied in a palm grove in the village of Hibhib. Task Force operators had recovered the men’s bodies and carried them as trophies to Balad. Both now had swaths of white cloth draped across their midsections, but were otherwise naked. Zarqawi’s face—wide, round, and bearded, his big eyes closed, a smear of blood still lurid across his left cheek—was unmistakable from his frequent videotaped boasts and pronouncements. He had been more sought-after than Osama bin Laden, and in recent years was considered the greater threat.

No more. The mood was one of subdued celebration. President Bush would call that day to congratulate the Task Force’s boss, the Joint Special Operations Commander Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal. For many, the satisfaction was tempered by photos of the dead children. They were hard to look at.

The unit’s female J2, or chief intelligence officer, embraced a young woman in a T-shirt and khaki cargo pants who was part of the two-person gator team that had produced what is known in the trade as “lethal information.”

“I am so glad I chose you for this,” she said.

McChrystal himself came by. A tall, slender, very soldierly-looking man, he was an Army briefer during the Persian Gulf War, but has been infrequently seen or

photographed in recent years because of his clandestine post. He and his top commanders stared down at Zarqawi with evident satisfaction. Everyone leaned in to listen.

“Yep,” said one of the colonels, “that’s one dead son of a bitch.”

Early the next morning, the terrorist’s demise was revealed to the rest of the world at the Combined Press Information Center, in Baghdad.

“Today is a great day in Iraq,” said General Caldwell, the spokesman for the Multi-National Force in Iraq. “Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is dead, no longer able to terrorize innocent Iraqi civilians ... Today, Iraq takes a giant step forward—closer to peace within, closer to unity throughout, and closer to a world without terror.”

Perhaps. Like so much else about the Iraq War, it was a feel-good moment that amounted to little more than a bump on a road to further mayhem. Today, Iraq seems no closer to peace, unity, and a terror-free existence than it did last June. If anything, the brutal attacks on civilian targets that Zarqawi pioneered have worsened.

Still, the hit was without question a clear success in an effort that has produced few. Since so much of the “war on terror” consists of hunting down men like Zarqawi, the process is instructive. In the official version of how it happened, which is classified, the woman embraced by McChrystal’s J2, and her two male interrogation partners, received primary credit for the breakthrough. All three were duly decorated. But like the whole war in Iraq, the real story is more complicated, and more interesting.

The truth is known to those interrogators involved, to their immediate chain of command, to a military historian who interviewed the principals, and to a small circle of officials who have been briefed about it. There are detailed accounts of the interrogation sessions that describe the tactics and motivations of the gators. So there are those who know the story well who were not directly involved in it. In deference to the secret nature of the work, I have not used the real names of the interrogators involved, but the aliases they assumed in Iraq. Their story affords a unique glimpse of the kinds of people employed in this secret effort and how they work, and it limns the hidden culture of interrogation that has grown up in the last six years.

‘THE CUSTOMER’

Most of the gators directly involved in this breakthrough were recruited in 2005. They were young men and women who had accumulated valuable experience conducting hostile interrogation. Some were on active duty, a good number from military-police units. Some were veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq, where they had so distinguished themselves that the Special Operations Command had sought them out. Some

were working for private contractors such as L-3 Communications; some were civilian employees of the Defense Intelligence Agency. Some had experience in civilian law enforcement or criminal law, and had volunteered to do such work for the military. Some were lawyers. Some had advanced degrees. Some called themselves “reserve bums,” because they signed on for tours of duty in various parts of the world for six months to a year, and then took long, exotic vacations before accepting another job. One raced cars when between jobs; another was an avid surfer who between assignments lived on the best beaches in the world; another had earned a law degree while working as a city cop in Arlington, Texas; another worked as an investigator for the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Montgomery, Alabama. They all loved the work and signed up for the most dangerous and important assignments.

This one had come with an irresistible job description, with phrases like *high priority* and *top secret* and *for an unidentified military client*. Enlistees were sent to the Army’s interrogation school at Fort Huachuca, in southeastern Arizona, for a few weeks of brush-up training. They all received a dazzling two-hour PowerPoint presentation about Iraqi history and culture. They had all surmised right away that the job meant working with

THE TEAM

Balad Air Base is a sun-blasted 15-square-mile expanse of concrete, crushed stone, and sand about an hour’s drive north of Baghdad. It is one of the largest and busiest bases in Iraq, complete with a Green Beans coffee shop, Pizza Hut, and Burger King open around the clock. It is also known as Camp Anaconda, or, informally, as “Mortaritaville,” for the frequency of mortar attacks on the 25,000 personnel stationed there. Few of that number ever set foot behind the towering concrete barriers in the far north corner, known to one and all as “The Compound,” home to the estimated 1,000 American and British special-operations soldiers of Task Force 145, and to the most urgent special-ops campaign in the world.

Because of the exigency of the fight in Iraq, according to groundbreaking reports by Sean Naylor of *Army Times*, Zarqawi had been assigned a higher priority than even Osama bin Laden and his second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri. The Task Force’s soldier elite, its “shooters,” includes Delta operators, SEALs, members of the Air Force’s 24th Special Tactics Squadron, and selected soldiers from the Army’s 75th Ranger Regiment. Transportation is provided by helicopter crews and pilots from

**Interrogation, at its most artful, is a contest of wits.
By intimidation or bluff, the gator must somehow
find a way to turn a prisoner against his own cause.**

“special operators”—the military’s elite, secret soldiers, who handle only top-priority jobs—but they did not know for sure until after the training, when they were flown from Arizona to Fort Bragg, in North Carolina, headquarters for the Special Operations Command. At Bragg, no one speaks directly of Task Force 145, but it was abundantly clear that was the outfit they would be working with. They were told, “There is no such thing as rank where you are going; everyone is focused on the mission. No one will get any credit for anything that happens.”

Before being sent to Iraq, the gators underwent a final interview designed to weed out anyone emotionally ill-suited for the work. During the interview, the eager recruit would usually be insulted. “You must be kidding,” the questioner would say. “You don’t have anywhere near enough experience to do a job like this.” Any recruits who got angry, flustered, or upset—and some did—were sent home. Those selected to proceed were instructed to adopt aliases by which they would be known “in theater.”

Only then were they told that the “customer” would be Zarqawi.

the Nightstalkers, the Army’s 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment. The tempo is rapid; the unit conducts an average of a mission a day, with four strike forces stationed around Iraq. The intel operation that guides the Task Force hums around the clock, seven days a week. Its mission is to unravel Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia and other insurgent groups from the inside out, by squeezing each new arrest for details about the chain of command. Newly arrested detainees are constantly delivered to the facility, blindfolded, bound, wearing blue jumpsuits.

Inside the Compound are a number of small buildings that have been recently erected as well as two large ones left over from when Saddam Hussein’s air force owned Balad—one a large dome-shaped airplane hangar, the other a flat-roofed structure of about the same size. Both were painted tan to blend with the desert landscape. The flat-roofed building houses the holding cells, each of which has stone walls, a concrete slab, a pillow, and a blanket. Detainees are kept one to a cell. The interior of the hangar is divided into 10 interrogation rooms, separated by plywood walls and usually furnished with white plastic chairs and a small table. Each room has a video camera so that



A SOLDIER with a scout platoon views the remains of the house in which Zarqawi was killed.

a senior interrogator in a separate control room with two rows of TV monitors can observe the questioning.

During the hunt for Zarqawi, interrogations took place in two shifts, morning and night, with interpreters, or “terps,” providing translation. The gators wore civilian clothes for their sessions, and were allowed to grow out their hair or beards. The less the detainees knew about their rank or role in the military, the better. There was virtually no downtime. When the gators were not questioning detainees, they were writing up reports or conferring with each other and their commanders, brainstorming strategy, eating, or sleeping in their air-conditioned “hooches,” small metal rectangular containers flown in by contractors. Alcohol was forbidden. Their rec center had a gym, a television set that got the Armed Forces Network, and a small Internet café. But recreation was not especially encouraged. One gator described the atmosphere as “spare and intense, in a good way.” They were doing their country’s most vital work.

The hunt for Zarqawi had begun shortly after the invasion of Iraq, in the summer of 2003, when the U.S. military took two Special Forces units (one was in Iraq looking for Saddam Hussein; the other had been in Afghanistan

hunting for bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders) and joined them together into what was then called Task Force 6-26. The Special Forces had come maddeningly close to getting Zarqawi on several occasions. In late 2004, Iraqi security forces actually captured Zarqawi near Falluja but, supposedly ignorant of his identity, released him. In February 2005, Task Force members had learned that he would be traveling on a stretch of road along the Tigris River, but their timing was off, and after the elusive terrorist crashed through their roadblock, he was gone.

The interrogation methods employed by the Task Force were initially notorious. When the hunt started, in 2003, the unit was based at Camp Nama, at Baghdad International Airport, where abuse of detainees quickly became common. According to later press reports in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and other news outlets, tactics at Nama ranged from cruel and unusual to simply juvenile—one account described Task Force soldiers shooting detainees with paintballs. In early 2004, both the CIA and the FBI complained to military authorities about such practices. The spy agency then banned its personnel from working at Camp Nama. Interrogators at the facility were reportedly stripping prisoners naked and

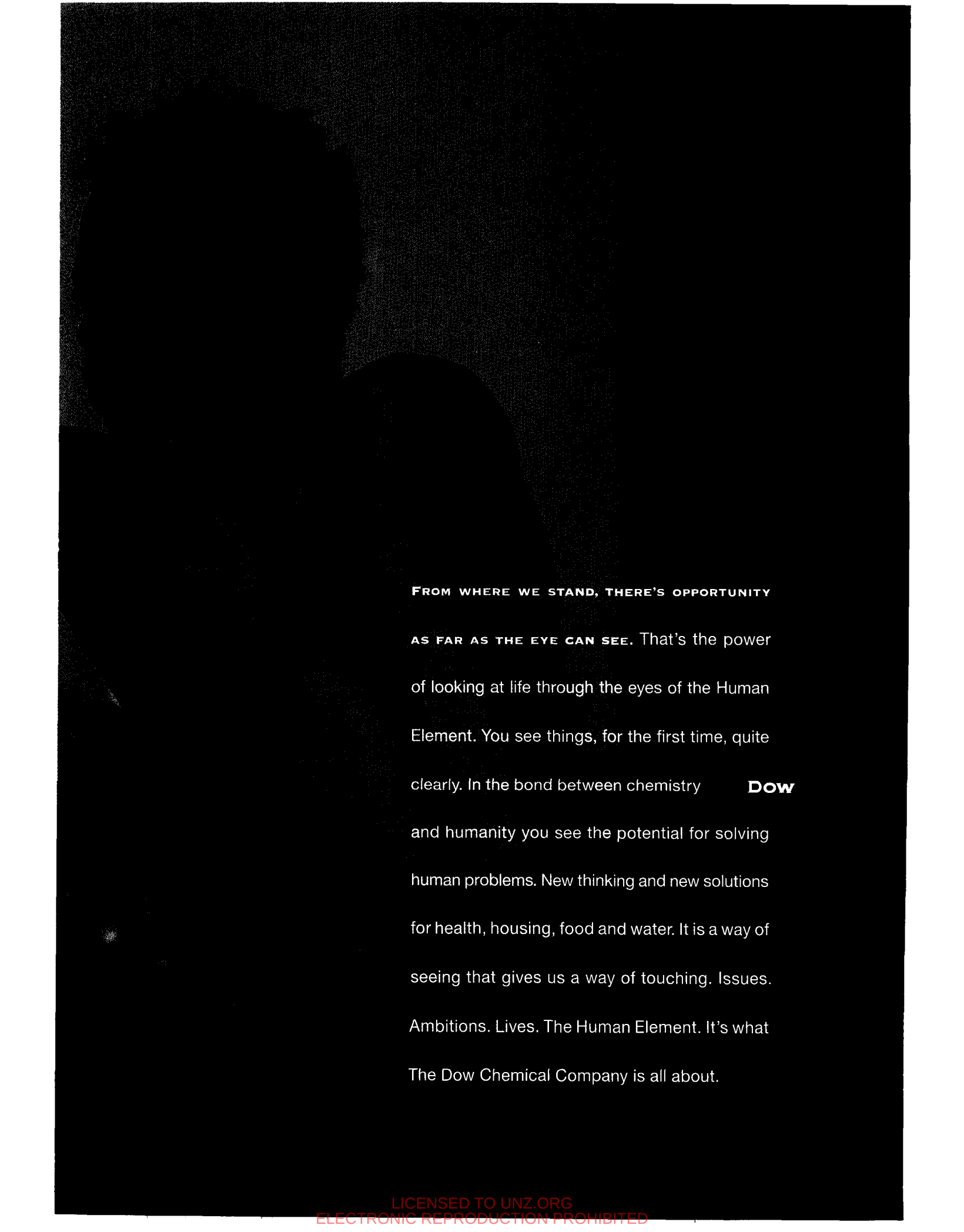
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hosing them down in the cold, beating them, employing “stress positions,” and keeping them awake for long hours. But after the prisoner-abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib came to light in April 2004, the military cracked down on such practices. By March of last year, 34 Task Force members had been disciplined, and 11 were removed from the unit for mistreating detainees. Later last year, five Army Rangers working at the facility were convicted of punching and kicking prisoners.

The unit was renamed Task Force 145 in the summer of 2004 and was moved to Balad, where the new batch of gators began arriving the following year. According to those interviewed for this story, harsh treatment of detainees had ended. Physical abuse was outlawed, as were sensory deprivation and the withholding or altering of food as punishment. The backlash from Abu Ghraib had produced so many restrictions that gators were no longer permitted to work even a standard good cop/bad cop routine. The interrogation-room cameras were faithfully monitored, and gators who crossed the line would be interrupted in mid-session.

The quest for fresh intel came to rely on subtler methods. Gators worked with the battery of techniques outlined in an Army manual and taught at Fort Huachuca, such as “ego up,” which involved flattery; “ego down,” which meant denigrating a detainee; and various simple con games—tricking a detainee into believing you already knew something you did not, feeding him misinformation about friends or family members, and so forth. Deciding how to approach a detainee was more art than science. Talented gators wrote their own scripts for questioning, adopting whatever roles seemed most appropriate, and adjusting on the fly. They carefully avoided making offers they could not keep, but often dangled “promises” that were subtly incomplete—instead of offering to move a prisoner to a better cell, for instance, a gator might promise to “see the boss” about doing so. Sometimes the promise was kept. Fear, the most useful interrogation tool, was always present. The well-publicized abuses at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere put all detainees on edge, and assurances that the U.S. command had cracked down were not readily believed. The prospect of being shipped to the larger prison—notorious during the American occupation, and even more so during the Saddam era—was enough to persuade many subjects to talk. This was, perhaps, the only constructive thing to result from the Abu Ghraib scandal, which otherwise remains one of the biggest setbacks of the war.

It was an exciting, challenging job, filled with a sense of urgent purpose. Most of the gators had a military background, and they found the lack of protocol liberating. As the gators had been told, rank inside the Compound was eschewed entirely. People referred to each other by their nicknames. The key players in the final push for Zarqawi were known as:

- “Mary.” The young woman congratulated by the J2, Mary was a stocky woman in her early 20s, with Asian features and straight dark hair; her intelligence and tenacity had earned her the reputation of being the most skilled interrogator in the unit.
- “Lenny.” A Navy reservist from the Philadelphia area, Lenny had a background in the computer industry and had done a previous tour at Guantánamo Bay’s Camp X-Ray. A wiry man in his mid-30s, he smoked a lot, shaved his head, and wore a goatee. He had a tough-guy, street-kid manner, and was usually teamed with Mary.
- “Dr. Matthew,” aka “Doc.” A tightly wound, precise man in his 30s, with short, thin blond hair, Doc had worked as a military-police investigator before becoming a reservist. A senior interrogator at Balad, he was considered an intellectual, though his honorific was an exaggeration: He had earned two master’s degrees, one in international relations and another in management. Between jobs, he surfed.
- “Matt.” A slender, dark-haired active-duty Air Force technical sergeant in his early 30s, Matt liked to present himself as a simple country boy, but was not one. He was from the Midwest and liked to race cars.
- “Mike.” A commercial pilot from Nebraska in his early 30s, he had joined the Army because he wanted to be involved in the war effort. Extremely energetic and gung-ho, Mike had less experience than most of his colleagues, but was quickly regarded as a natural.
- “Nathan.” Tall, wiry, and dark-haired, Nathan was one of the few gators who could speak some Arabic. A civilian contractor, he once got in trouble with the unit commander for stretching even the Task Force’s loose apparel standards by wearing a bright Hawaiian print shirt to the mess area.
- “Tom.” A veteran of Bosnia in his late 40s, Tom was unlike most of the others in that he was married and had children. He was short and round and balding, and was always slightly unkempt.

This was the team that would locate Zarqawi.

THE INTERROGATION BEGINS

The first major clue on the trail that led to Zarqawi came in February 2006, from a detainee Mike was questioning. The man had admitted his association with the “Anger Brigades,” a Sunni group loosely aligned with al-Qaeda. In a series of intense sessions that the other gators regarded as brilliant, Mike learned of residences in Yusufiya that the insurgent leadership sometimes used as safe houses. They were placed under heavy surveillance, and through a mid-April series of raids during which a number of suicide bombers were killed, a new crop of suspected mid-level al-Qaeda operatives was captured and delivered to Balad. It was on one of these raids that Task Force operatives found a videotape with outtakes from a

recent Zarqawi press release, the one showing him wearing a black do-rag, a black shirt, and a suicide belt, and carrying an automatic rifle. The outtakes showed this fearsome terrorist fumbling awkwardly with the weapon and being instructed in its use by another man. The military released the new images in hopes of diminishing Zarqawi's stature. What the Task Force didn't realize when they discovered the tape was that Zarqawi himself was only one block away.

Five of the men captured during these raids were assigned to teams of interrogators at Balad. Two of them would prove to be the most valuable. The first, whom we will call Abu Raja, was assigned to Matt and Nathan. The second, an older and more imposing figure, we will call Abu Haydr. He was assigned to Mary and Lenny.

Abu Raja was a sophisticated man in his mid-30s, a professional who spoke fluent English. Round, soft, and balding, he wore the regulation Saddam-era Sunni moustache. He came from a family that had been well-connected during the tyrant's reign; before the American invasion, he'd had a thriving business. A relative of his had been killed in the long war Iraq fought with Iran in

faith. He admitted his sympathy for the insurgency. He had been arrested once before and had served time in Abu Ghraib, he said, and did not wish to return. He said Abu Raja had asked him to attend the meeting where they had both been captured, and that he was there only because the people at the house needed him to operate a video camera. This was the same story told by Abu Raja.

"I don't even know why we were there," he told Mary and Lenny.

For three weeks, from mid-April to early May, Abu Haydr was questioned twice daily, and gave up nothing. Three weeks is a long time for interrogators to hold on to someone. Mary was forceful and thorough. Lenny's approach was consistent; he tended to hammer at the man relentlessly, taking him over the same ground again and again, trying to shake his confidence or just wear him out. It wasn't sophisticated, but it often got results, especially when combined with Lenny's imposing tough-guy demeanor. Abu Haydr took it all in stride, stubbornly unruffled. Before every response, he

The ploy played upon Abu Haydr's belief that he was operating in a multilayered reality, and at a deeper level than those around him; secrecy made Doc seem like a high-level connection.

the 1980s, and Abu Raja hated all Iranians. He saw the American invasion as a conspiracy between the Iranian mullahs and the United States to wipe out Iraq's minority Sunnis. Though Abu Raja was initially defiant, Matt and Nathan sized him up as a timid man, neither ideologically committed nor loyal. They battered him with rapid-fire questions, never giving him time to think, and they broke him—or so they thought—in two days. He agreed to talk about anyone in al-Qaeda who outranked him, but not about those who held less important positions. Since the Task Force's method was to work its way up the chain, this suited the gators perfectly.

Abu Haydr was more difficult. He was a big, genial man who nearly buckled the white plastic chairs in the interrogation rooms. He was 43 years old, with a wide, big-featured face, big ears, a well-trimmed beard, and fair skin. He was married and had four children. He also spoke fluent English. Before the American invasion, he'd had an important government job and had made a good living. He had hated Saddam, he said, but when the tyrant fell, he had lost everything. He looked tough and boasted that he had a black belt in karate, but his manner was gentle and his hands were smooth and delicate. He spoke in a deliberate, professorial way. He had studied the Koran and, while not overtly pious, knew a great deal about his

would lean his bulk back in the groaning chair, fold his graceful hands, and meditate like a scholar.

Doc, who was observing both interrogations in his role as a supervisor, saw that Mary and Lenny were getting nowhere, so he asked the Army captain supervising the process to replace them. This was not an unusual request from a senior gator; detainees were often placed with different teams when someone felt that an alternate approach might work, and Doc had asked to shift detainees before. But this request was denied. Given the circumstances of Abu Haydr's arrest—and his age and sophistication—the Task Force was highly suspicious of him, and there were those high up the chain, Doc was told, who wanted Mary on his case.

It was easy to dismiss Doc's concern for several reasons. He was known to be overbearing, and some of the gators felt he supervised their work a little *too* closely. That may have been particularly galling to Mary, who had been at Balad longer than Doc and was regarded as the best in the Task Force. Their colleagues knew that there was something of an ego clash between those two. Doc was older and more experienced, and could not always disguise his resentment at the organization's higher regard for his younger colleague. To orient him when he first arrived at Balad, Task Force officers had assigned Doc to observe

Mary. After a few days, he had told his commander that he was unimpressed and had asked to be placed with someone else. When he was assigned the supervisory role, he reprimanded Mary directly and complained to others that she seemed to spend an inordinate amount of time on the Internet chatting with her boyfriend, who was also serving in Iraq. She sometimes skipped staff meetings, and while some of the gators were doing three and four interrogation sessions a day, she stuck resolutely to two. Doc argued that she seemed inexcusably out of step with the fervid pace. Others had also expressed concern about the way she dressed. Mary usually wore khaki cargo pants and two layers of T-shirts, which they suggested were cut too low at the top, exposing cleavage, or too high at the bottom, showing her midriff—displays offensive to religious Muslim detainees. But neither Mary's status nor her habits had changed in response to Doc's complaints. The tension between them was observed by all. For whatever combination of reasons, Doc's attempt to move her aside failed.

Abu Raja, meanwhile, was a wreck. After weeks of grilling, he had given up all that he could give, he complained, but the gators kept after him day and night. One day, Doc sat in on his questioning. Watching an earlier interrogation, he had noticed that Abu Raja had slipped. Going over a story he had told many times before,

more time. He knew Abu Haydr dreaded going back to Abu Ghraib, and he had an idea for how to get him talking.

BREAKING ABU HAYDR

The two men—the big Iraqi and the intense blond-haired gator—talked for five hours in the interrogation room; because Doc was a supervisor himself, their conversation was not monitored. They talked about children and football and wrestling.

"I was a great wrestler," Abu Haydr announced.

"You look like one," Doc told him.

In his weeks of watching, the American had noted Abu Haydr's chronic braggadocio. The Iraqi constantly trumpeted his skills—the black belt in karate, advanced knowledge of the Koran, expertise in logic and persuasion—like a man determined to prove his importance and worth. He spoke little about his family, his wife and children. He seemed completely preoccupied with himself, and he presented his frequent opinions forcefully, as the simple truth. The two men discussed the historical basis for the rift between the Sunnis and the Shia, something Doc had studied. And when the Iraqi lectured Doc on child-rearing, the younger man nodded with appreciation. When Abu Haydr again proclaimed his talents in the arts of logic and persuasion, Doc announced himself out-argued and persuaded.

**There comes a moment in every successful
interrogation when the detainee's defenses begin
to give way. Doc had come to that moment.**

Abu Raja mentioned for the first time that Abu Haydr had sometimes met alone with Abu Raja's boss.

This was different, and odd. Why, Doc now asked, would Abu Haydr, Abu Raja's subordinate, a man who had been called in just to operate a video camera, be meeting separately with Abu Raja's boss? The detainee had no convincing explanation for it, and it left Doc with a hunch: What if Abu Raja had been lying about the other man's status all along? Why would he do that? Was he frightened of Abu Haydr? Protecting him? It forced a fresh look at the older prisoner, who was more impressive than Abu Raja anyway. What if he had been Abu Raja's superior in the organization? That would mean Abu Haydr was even more important than they had suspected. The problem was that Mary and Lenny were stymied, and the team had all but given up on getting information from Abu Haydr. He had made a final statement, been issued new clothes, and was on the list for transport back to Abu Ghraib.

With Abu Haydr just hours away from being shipped out, Doc asked for and received permission to speak to him one

Their conversation turned to politics. Like many other detainees, Abu Haydr was fond of conspiracy theories. He complained that the United States was making a big mistake allowing the Shia, the majority in Iraq, to share power with the Sunnis. He lectured Doc on the history of his region, and pointed out that Iraqi Sunnis and the United States shared a very dangerous enemy: Iran. He saw his Shia countrymen not just as natural allies with Iran but as more loyal to Iranian mullahs than to any idea of a greater Iraq. As he saw it—and he presented it as simple fact—the ongoing struggle would determine whether Iraq would survive as a Sunni state or simply become part of a greater Shia Iran. America, Abu Haydr said, would eventually need help from the Sunnis to keep this Shia dynasty from dominating the region.

Doc had heard all this before, but he told Abu Haydr that it was a penetrating insight, that the detainee had come remarkably close to divining America's true purpose in Iraq. The real reason for the U.S. presence in the region, the gator explained, was to get American forces



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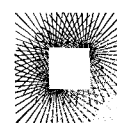
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into position for an attack on Iran. They were building air bases and massing troops. In the coming war, Sunnis and Americans would be allies. Only those capable of looking past the obvious could see it. The detainee warmed to this. All men enjoy having their genius recognized.

"The others are ignorant," Abu Haydr said, referring to Mary and Lenny. "They know nothing of Iraq or the Koran. I have never felt comfortable talking with them."

It was not a surprising comment. Detainees often tried to play one team of gators off another. But Doc saw it as an opening, and hit upon a ploy. He told the prisoner that he now understood his full importance. He said he was not surprised that Abu Haydr had been able to lead his questioners around by their noses. Then he took a more mendacious leap. He told Abu Haydr that he, Doc, wasn't just another gator; that he was, in fact, in charge of the Compound's entire interrogation mill. He was the Boss; that was why he had waited until the last minute to step in.

"I believe you are a very important man," he told Abu Haydr. "I think you have a position of power in the insurgency, and I think I am in a position to help you."

Abu Haydr was listening with interest.

"We both know what I want," Doc said. "You have information you could trade. It is your only source of leverage right now. You don't want to go to Abu Ghraib, and I can help you, but you have to give me something in trade. A guy as smart as you—you are the type of Sunni we can use to shape the future of Iraq." If Abu Haydr would betray his organization, Doc implied, the Americans would make him a very big man indeed.

There was no sign that the detainee knew he was being played. He nodded sagely. This was the kind of moment gators live for. Interrogation, at its most artful, is a contest of wits. The gator has the upper hand, of course. In a situation like the one at Balad, the Task Force had tremendous leverage over any detainee, including his reasonable fear of beating, torture, lengthy imprisonment, or death. While gators at that point were not permitted even to threaten such things, the powerless are slow to surrender suspicion. Still, a prisoner generally has compelling reasons to resist. He might be deeply committed to his cause, or fear the consequences of cooperation, if word of it were to reach his violent comrades.

The gator's job is to somehow find a way through this tangle of conflicting emotions by intimidation or bluff. The height of the art is to completely turn the detainee, to con him into being helpful to the very cause he has fought against. There comes a moment in every successful interrogation when the detainee's defenses begin to give way. Doc had come to that moment with Abu Haydr. He had worked at the detainee's ego as if it were a loose screw. All of his ruses dovetailed. If Doc was an important, powerful man—better still, if he was secretly in charge—his respect for Abu Haydr meant all the more. After all, wouldn't it take the

most capable of the Americans, the man in charge, to fully comprehend and appreciate Abu Haydr's significance?

Doc pressed his advantage.

"You and I know the name of a person in your organization who you are very close to," Doc said. "I need you to tell me that name so that I know I can trust you. Then we can begin negotiating." In fact, the American had no particular person in mind. His best hope was that Abu Haydr might name a heretofore unknown mid-level insurrectionist.

Ever circumspect, Abu Haydr pondered his response even longer than usual.

At last he said, "Abu Ayyub al-Masri."

Doc was flabbergasted. Masri was the senior adviser to Zarqawi, the second-in-command of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia. The gator hid his surprise and excitement. He thanked the prisoner, pretending that this was the name he had expected.

"Now we can begin negotiating, but I have to leave now."

"I only will talk to you," said Abu Haydr.

"I can't promise you that," the American said. "You should talk and be friendly to whoever comes in to question you. I will be watching."

He promised—avoiding the usual hedge—to get Abu Haydr an extra blanket and extra food, and did. And he got the detainee off the list for transport to Abu Ghraib.

THE FEUD THAT FELLEZ ZARQAWI

"Why did he decide to talk?" asked Doc's commander.

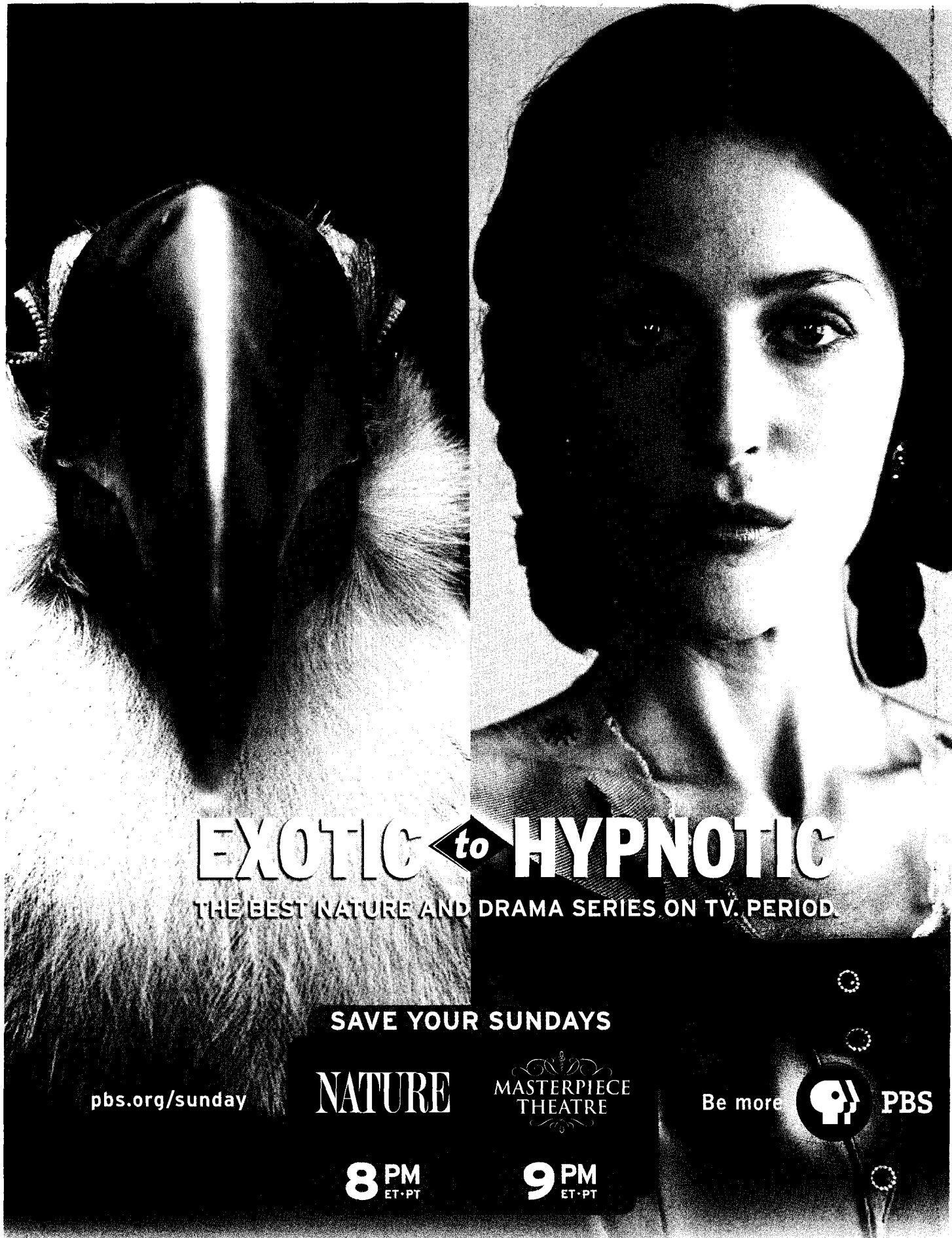
The gator explained that he had promised Abu Haydr "an important role in the future of Iraq." He also reported that he had represented himself to the detainee as the man in charge. That infuriated Lenny, who was already annoyed that Doc had been questioning "his" prisoner behind his back. Lenny complained that the lie undermined his position in future interrogations.

"He was scheduled to leave," Doc reminded him.

Despite Abu Haydr's insistence that he speak only to "Dr. Matthew," his interrogation resumed with the regular team of gators. Lenny promptly told him that their colleague had lied when he said he was in charge.

Doc was infuriated, and he took his outrage to his commander. Lenny was more concerned about protecting his turf than the mission, Doc complained, and demanded that he be reassigned, but this request, too, was denied. Concerned that his breakthrough would be squandered, Doc decided to go behind his commander's back. He paid the first of many unauthorized visits to Abu Haydr's cell in the holding block, away from the cameras monitoring the interrogation rooms. He told Abu Haydr that his colleagues were not allowed to reveal that he was in charge.

"I'm still around, and I'm still watching," Doc told him. "Talk to them as if you were talking to me."



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Abu Haydr asked how much information he would have to give to earn Doc's assistance.

"Right now, you are at about 40 percent," he was told, "but you must never mention our deal to anyone." Doc swore him to secrecy about their informal talks.

And, curiously, the feud between the gators began to help the interrogation. Abu Haydr seemed to enjoy the subterfuge. Doc's visits with him were unauthorized; if his fellow gators found out about them, they would be furious, as would his commander. So Doc, unable to deliver the captive's information himself, had to persuade Abu Haydr to talk, not to him but to Mary and Lenny. He stayed vague about what information he wanted and kept using the percentage scale to push the detainee. Sure enough, Abu Haydr responded. In his sessions with the others, he

top of the organization. The ploy played upon his belief that he was operating in a multilayered reality, and at a deeper level than those around him; the secrecy just reinforced the ruse that Doc was a high-level connection. In the middle of this process, Mary started questioning Abu Haydr with the older gator they called Tom, and Lenny continued on in separate shifts by himself.

In early June, after Doc told the prisoner he was at "90 percent," Abu Haydr promised to give up a vital piece of information at his next session. And he did.

"My friend is Sheikh al-Rahman," he told Mary and Tom.

He explained that Rahman, a figure well-known to the Task Force, met regularly with Zarqawi. He said that whenever they met, Rahman observed a security ritual that involved changing cars a number of times. Only when he got into a small blue car, Abu Haydr said, would he be taken directly to Zarqawi.

Days later, with the Task Force watching from a drone high over Baghdad, Rahman got into a small blue car, but the surveillance team promptly lost him in traffic. There was tremendous disappointment and frustration at the Compound. Another precious chance had been lost. But after just a few more days, late in the afternoon of June 7, Rahman got into the blue car again. This time the Task Force observed him all the way to the little concrete house in the palm grove at Hibhib. Electronic intercepts may have helped confirm that Rahman was meeting with Zarqawi in the house (the terrorist leader never used cell phones, which are relatively easy to track, but he did use satellite phones, which are harder to pinpoint, but not—as he apparently assumed—impossible). Convinced they had their man, the Task Force leaders decided not to wait for their shooters to get into position. Waiting seemed ill-advised, and besides, storming the house would likely result in a firefight; in the confusion, Zarqawi might find another chance to slip away. A faster, more certain, and more deadly strike was ordered.

High over Iraq, the U.S. Air Force maintains a constant patrol of strike aircraft that can be called upon immediately. The mission was tasked to two F-16 pilots, who had spent the day looking for roadside bombs from the sky. The pilots were told only that the target was "high value." At 6:12 p.m., one of the jets dropped the first laser-guided bomb; minutes later, it dropped the second. Both hit their target, reducing the house to rubble. Villagers said the earth shook with each blast.

According to General Caldwell, Iraqi forces were on the scene first, having heard the explosion from nearby. They found Zarqawi badly wounded but still alive, the only one to survive the strike. About half an hour after the second bomb hit, he was being carried out on a stretcher when the first American soldiers arrived, an 11-man military training team embedded with a local Iraqi army unit.



BULL'S-EYE: satellite imagery of the strike target

confirmed his status above Abu Raja's and began talking about significant al-Qaeda figures. He was still cagey. He wanted to buy himself Doc's help, but he didn't want to pay any more for it than necessary.

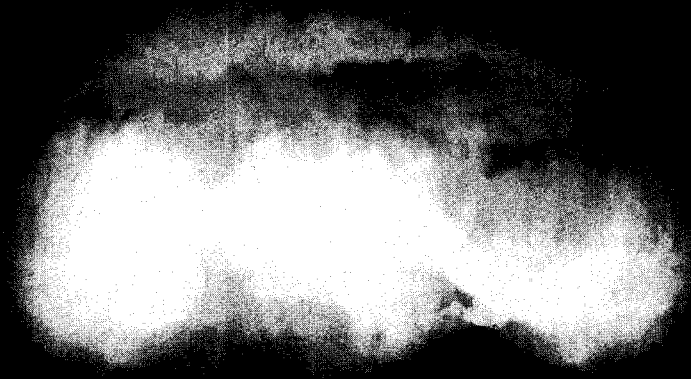
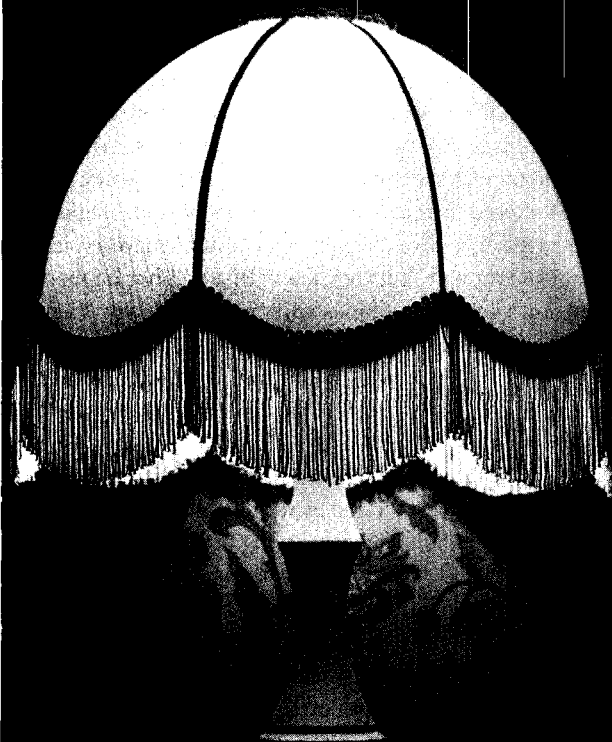
Doc would regularly slip into Abu Haydr's cell to grade his progress.

"What percent am I at now?" the detainee would ask.

"Fifty percent," Doc would say.

This went on for three weeks, and soon the Task Force was mapping Zarqawi's organization with greater and greater detail. During a series of raids on May 13 and 14, shooters killed one of Zarqawi's lieutenants, Abu Mustafa, and 15 others in his network. Eight suspects were detained. Intel gleaned from them sent the shooters back out to arrest more men, who delivered still more information. The eventual result was what the Task Force called an "unblinking eye" over the network. On May 17, two of Zarqawi's associates were killed, one of them his manager of foreign fighters. Punishing raids went on throughout that month.

Still, even though he clearly relished his "secret" sessions with Doc, Abu Haydr protected the men at the very



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The Americans took Zarqawi from the Iraqis, and a medic began treating him, securing his airway. Zarqawi spat blood and drifted in and out of consciousness. Caldwell said that the terrorist tried to get off the stretcher, but the soldiers resecured him. His breathing was labored, and his lungs soon failed him. Then his pulse gave out. It was pleasing to his pursuers that Zarqawi's last sight was of an American soldier.

Caldwell initially said that a child was killed in the bombing, but altered his statement the next day to say that no children had been killed. In the Compound, pictures from the blast site showed two dead children, both under age 5.

THE FIGHT GOES ON

A tape of the air strike was played at Caldwell's press conference. A black-and-white video shot from one of the bomber jets shows the long shadows of late afternoon on a dense patch of palm trees, and a large house before a narrow road. The first blast sends dark billows of gray smoke in four directions, in the shape of a cross. About two minutes later, when the smoke has blown off, the second blast produces a smaller, more contained plume of white smoke. Those inside would have had no warning. They would not have heard the jets, nor the bombs hurtling toward them.

Four of the gators involved were decorated for their service. Mary, Lenny, Tom and Doc were called to the general's office. Doc and Lenny, the Navy reservist, were awarded Bronze Stars; Mary and Tom received civilian medals. Two other civilian analysts were also recognized.

Several of those who had worked on the case for months felt the recognition was appropriate but somewhat misallocated. Mike, after all, had developed the information that had led to the arrests of Abu Raja and Abu Haydr; Matt and Nathan had broken Abu Raja; and Doc had invented the ploy that ultimately enabled the killing blow. His deep knowledge of Iraqi history and religion, and of Abu Haydr's distinctly Arab outlook, went well beyond the two-hour PowerPoint lecture on Iraqi culture the gators got at Fort Huachuca.

In the long run, the successful hunt for Zarqawi may not amount to much, but it offers lessons in how to use American power in subtler and more effective ways.

"The elimination of Zarqawi is neither the beginning nor is it the end, but it is a stride in the direction of law

and order, to an Iraq that is primed for the future, by a government that respects the rights of all Iraqi citizens," said General Caldwell at his triumphant press conference. He later added, "For the first time in three years, the Iraqi people really do have a chance here."

Some of the members of Task Force 145 were less sanguine. "Zarqawi's death was an achievement, but it was only symbolic," said one of them. "Zarqawi had hoped to incite a sectarian war, according to his letters, and he accomplished that. His strategy worked: Target the Shia so they will retaliate. When we killed Zarqawi, there were 10 just like him to take his place. As I see it, there is no incentive right now for the Sunnis *not* to join the insurgency. We haven't offered them anything—no economic, ideological, nor personal incentives. We tell them, 'You will have a voice in the government,' but they know that will not happen. They don't believe the Shias will give them a say. They hate the United States for creating this nightmare that

destroyed their lives, and which clouds their future, but they need us as a buffer. I've talked to a lot of Sunnis, and most are not motivated by religion or ideology. They are just trying to make it."

"This is the story of the whole war," said another. "Kill this one guy, and it will make things all better.' I still don't understand where this notion comes from. It's like we are still fighting a conventional war. This one doesn't work that way."

Seventeen other raids were conducted in and around Baghdad soon after Zarqawi's death. The shooters found suicide vests, passports, Iraqi army uniforms, and license plates hidden under floorboards. Another 25 Iraqis were issued blue jumpsuits and led to the interrogation rooms. Task Force 145's primary focus shifted to Zarqawi's successor, Abu Ayyub al-Masri. The insurgents' bombings continued. The fight went on.

As for Abu Raja and Abu Haydr, they were processed and shipped out. "Probably to Camp Cropper," said one of the gators, referring to a detention facility near Baghdad International Airport.

Mary and Lenny felt that Abu Haydr deserved a reward of some kind, but they were reminded that he had been an important mid-level figure in the deadly insurgency, a man who had on his hands, at least indirectly, the blood of many civilians and American soldiers. The idea of a reward was quickly dropped.

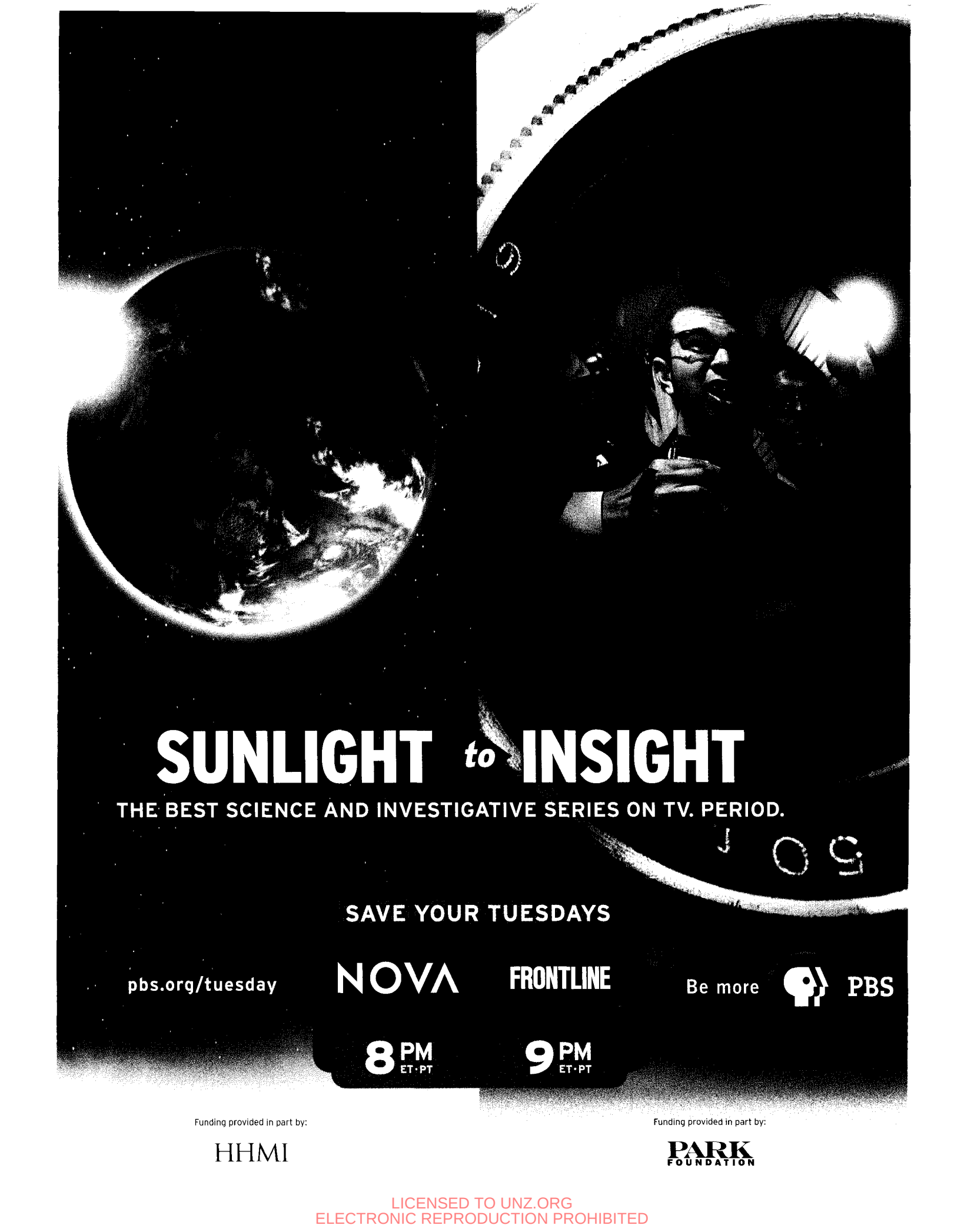
And what of Doc's pledge to Abu Haydr?

"Doc promised him an important role in the future of Iraq," said one gator. "And, by God, Abu Haydr got it. He was the man who led us to Zarqawi." ■

Mark Bowden is an Atlantic national correspondent.



ABU MUSAB AL-ZARQAWI on June 7, 2006



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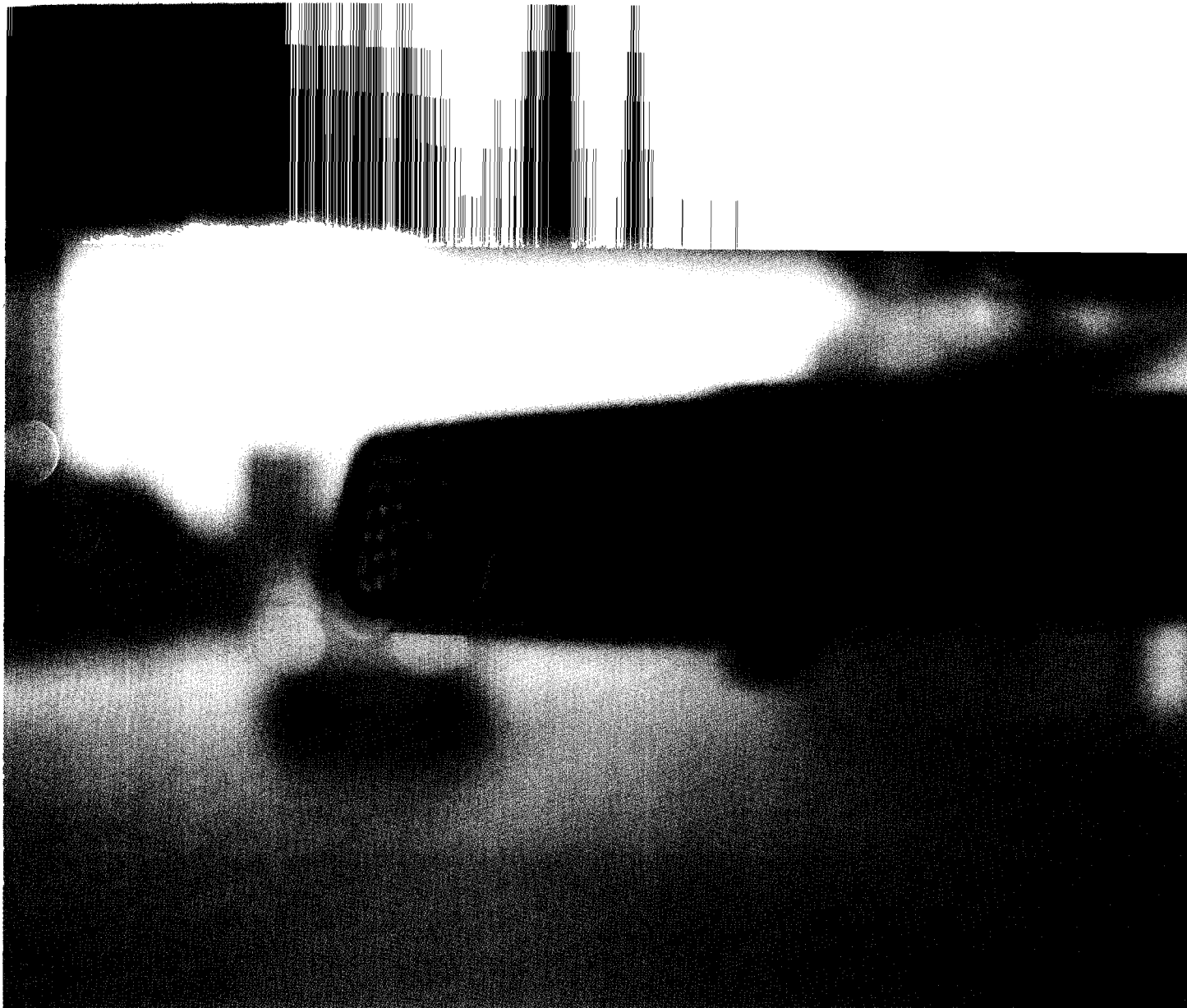
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Sodomy is punishable by death in Saudi Arabia, but gay life flourishes there. Why it is “easier to be gay than straight” in a society where everyone, homosexual and otherwise, lives in the closet

BY NADYA LABI

The Kingdom in the Closet

Yasser, a 26-year-old artist, was taking me on an impromptu tour of his hometown of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on a sweltering September afternoon. The air conditioner of his dusty Honda battled the heat, prayer beads dangled from the rearview mirror, and the smell of the cigarette he'd just smoked wafted toward me as he stopped to show me a barbershop that his friends frequent. Officially, men in Saudi Arabia aren't allowed to wear their hair long or to display jewelry—such vanities are usually deemed to violate an Islamic instruction that the sexes must not be too similar in appearance. But Yasser wears a silver necklace, a silver bracelet, and a sparkly red stud in his left ear, and his hair is shaggy. Yasser is homosexual, or so »



we would describe him in the West, and the barbershop we visited caters to gay men. Business is brisk.

Leaving the barbershop, we drove onto Tahlia Street, a broad avenue framed by palm trees, then went past a succession of sleek malls and slowed in front of a glass-and-steel shopping center. Men congregated outside and in nearby cafés. Whereas most such establishments have a family section, two of this area's cafés allow only men; not surprisingly, they are popular among men who prefer one another's company. Yasser gestured to a parking lot across from the shopping center, explaining that after midnight it would be "full of men picking up men." These days, he said, "you see gay people everywhere."

Yasser turned onto a side street, then braked suddenly. "Oh shit, it's a checkpoint," he said, inclining his head toward some traffic cops in brown uniforms. "Do you have your ID?" he asked me. He wasn't worried about the gay-themed nature of his tour—he didn't want to be caught alone with a woman. I rummaged through my purse, realizing that I'd left my passport in the hotel for safekeeping. Yasser looked behind him to see if he could

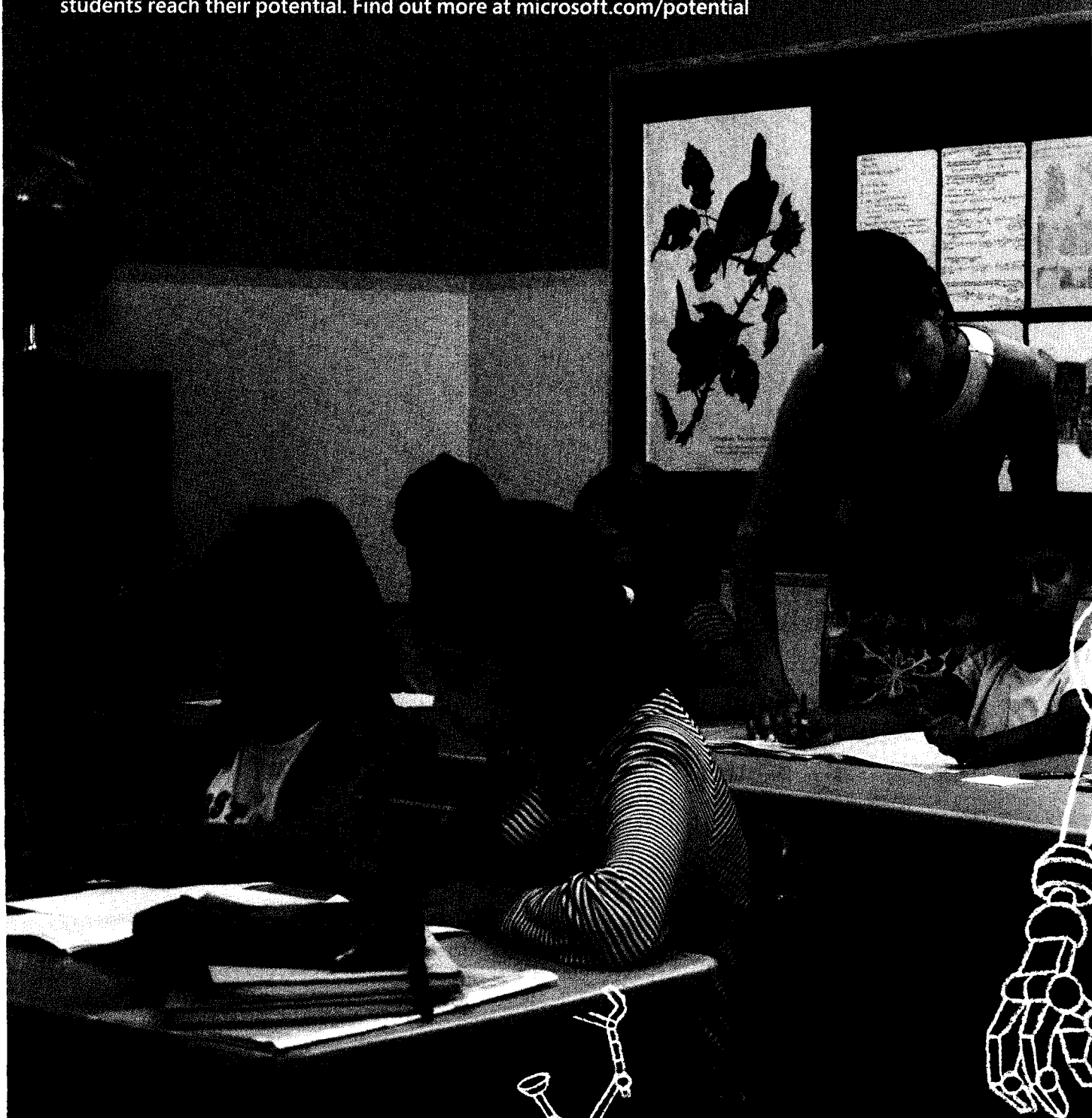
reverse the car, but had no choice except to proceed. To his relief, the cops nodded us through. "God, they freaked me out," Yasser said. As he resumed his narration, I recalled something he had told me earlier. "It's a lot easier to be gay than straight here," he had said. "If you go out with a girl, people will start to ask her questions. But if I have a date upstairs and my family is downstairs, they won't even come up."

Notorious for its adherence to Wahhabism, a puritanical strain of Islam, and as the birthplace of most of the 9/11 hijackers, Saudi Arabia is the only Arab country that claims *sharia*, or Islamic law, as its sole legal code. The list of prohibitions is long: It's *haram*—forbidden—to smoke, drink, go to discos, or mix with an unrelated person of the opposite gender. The rules are enforced by the *mutawwa'in*, religious authorities employed by the government's Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.

The kingdom is dominated by mosques and malls, which the *mutawwa'in* patrol in leather sandals and

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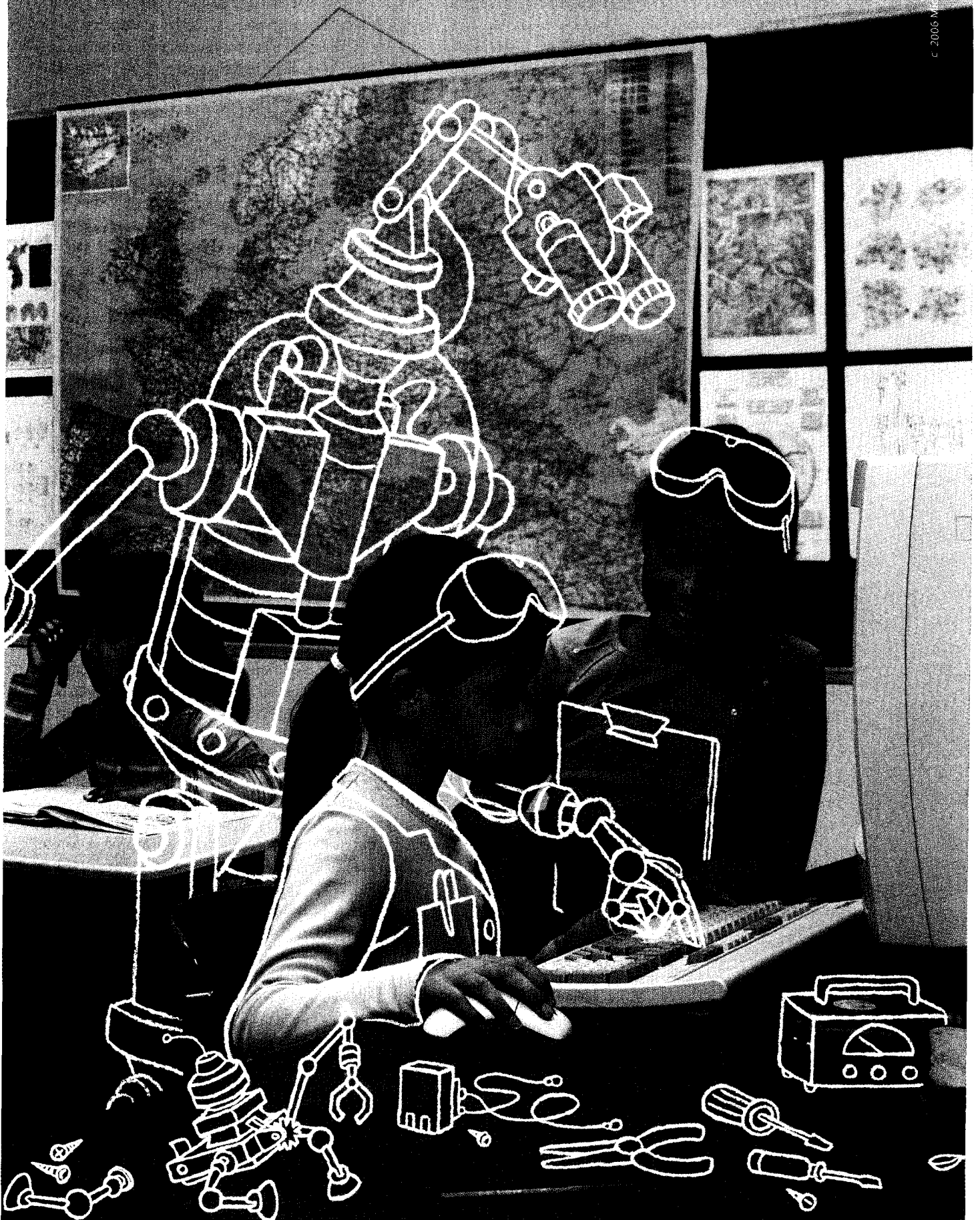


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shortened versions of the *thawb*, the traditional ankle-length white robe that many Saudis wear. Some *mutawwa'in* even bear marks of their devotion on their faces; they bow to God so adamantly that pressing their foreheads against the ground leaves a visible dent. The *mutawwa'in* prod shoppers to say their devotions when the shops close for prayer, several times daily. If they catch a boy and a girl on a date, they might haul the couple to the police station. They make sure that single men steer clear of the malls, which are family-only zones for the most part, unless they are with a female relative. Though the power of the *mutawwa'in* has been curtailed recently, their presence still inspires fear.

In Saudi Arabia, sodomy is punishable by death. Though that penalty is seldom applied, just this February a man in the Mecca region was executed for having sex with a boy, among other crimes. (For this reason, the names of most people in this story have been changed.) Ask many Saudis about homosexuality, and they'll wince with repugnance. "I disapprove," Rania, a 32-year-old human-resources manager, told me firmly. "Women weren't meant to be with women, and men aren't supposed to be with men."

'THEY WILL SEDUCE YOU'

When Yasser hit puberty, he grew attracted to his male cousins. Like many gay and lesbian teenagers everywhere, he felt isolated. "I used to have the feeling that I was the queerest in the country," he recalled. "But then I went to high school and discovered there are others like me. Then I find out, it's a whole society."

This society thrives just below the surface. During the afternoon, traffic cops patrol outside girls' schools as classes end, in part to keep boys away. But they exert little control over what goes on inside. A few years ago, a Jeddah-based newspaper ran a story on lesbianism in high schools, reporting that girls were having sex in the bathrooms. Yasmin, a 21-year-old student in Riyadh who'd had a brief sexual relationship with a girlfriend (and was the only Saudi woman who'd had a lesbian relationship who was willing to speak with me for this story), told me that one of the department buildings at her college is known as a lesbian enclave. The building has large bathroom stalls, which provide privacy, and walls covered with graffiti offering romantic and religious advice; tips include "she

For many Saudis, the fact that a man has sex with another man has little to do with "gayness." The act may fulfill a desire or a need, but it doesn't constitute an identity.

This legal and public condemnation notwithstanding, the kingdom leaves considerable space for homosexual behavior. As long as gays and lesbians maintain a public front of obeisance to Wahhabist norms, they are left to do what they want in private. Vibrant communities of men who enjoy sex with other men can be found in cosmopolitan cities like Jeddah and Riyadh. They meet in schools, in cafés, in the streets, and on the Internet. "You can be cruised anywhere in Saudi Arabia, any time of the day," said Radwan, a 42-year-old gay Saudi American who grew up in various Western cities and now lives in Jeddah. "They're quite shameless about it." Talal, a Syrian who moved to Riyadh in 2000, calls the Saudi capital a "gay heaven."

This is surprising enough. But what seems more startling, at least from a Western perspective, is that some of the men having sex with other men don't consider themselves gay. For many Saudis, the fact that a man has sex with another man has little to do with "gayness." The act may fulfill a desire or a need, but it doesn't constitute an identity. Nor does it strip a man of his masculinity, as long as he is in the "top," or active, role. This attitude gives Saudi men who engage in homosexual behavior a degree of freedom. But as a more Westernized notion of gayness—a notion that stresses orientation over acts—takes hold in the country, will this delicate balance survive?

doesn't really love you no matter what she tells you" and "before you engage in anything with [her] remember: God is watching you." In Saudi Arabia, "It's easier to be a lesbian [than a heterosexual]. There's an overwhelming number of people who turn to lesbianism," Yasmin said, adding that the number of men in the kingdom who turn to gay sex is even greater. "They're not really homosexual," she said. "They're like cell mates in prison."

This analogy came up again and again during my conversations. As Radwan, the Saudi American, put it, "Some Saudi [men] can't have sex with women, so they have sex with guys. When the sexes are so strictly segregated"—men are allowed little contact with women outside their families, in order to protect women's purity—"how do they have a chance to have sex with a woman and not get into trouble?" Tariq, a 24-year-old in the travel industry, explains that many "tops" are simply hard up for sex, looking to break their abstinence in whatever way they can. Francis, a 34-year-old beauty queen from the Philippines (in 2003 he won a gay beauty pageant held in a private house in Jeddah by a group of Filipinos), reported that he's had sex with Saudi men whose wives were pregnant or menstruating; when those circumstances changed, most of the men stopped calling. "If they can't use their wives," Francis said, "they have this option with gays."

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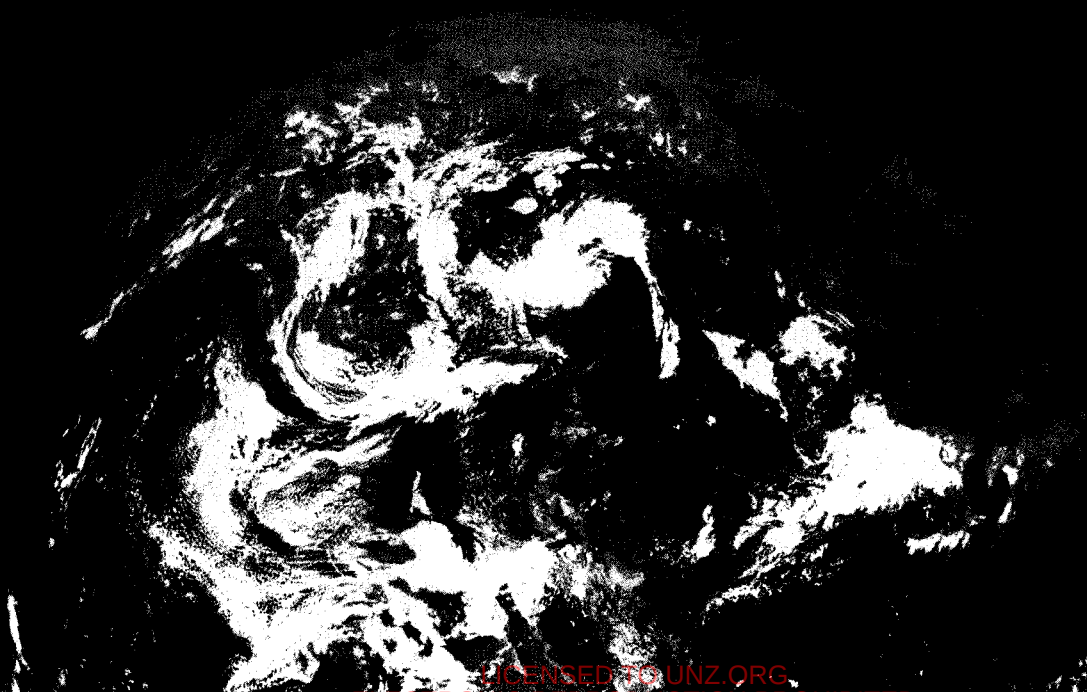
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Gay courting in the kingdom is often overt—in fact, the preferred mode is cruising. “When I was new here, I was worried when six or seven cars would follow me as I walked down the street,” Jamie, a 31-year-old Filipino florist living in Jeddah, told me. “Especially if you’re pretty like me, they won’t stop chasing you.” John Bradley, the author of *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis* (2005), says that most male Western expatriates here, gay or not, have been propositioned by Saudi men driving by “at any time of the day or night, quite openly and usually very, very persistently.”

Many gay expatriates say they feel more at home in the kingdom than in their native lands. Jason, a South African educator who has lived in Jeddah since 2002, notes that although South Africa allows gay marriage, “it’s as though there are more gays here.” For Talal, Riyadh became an escape. When he was 17 and living in Damascus, his father walked in on him having sex with a male friend. He hit Talal and grounded him for two months, letting him out of the house only after he swore he was no longer attracted to men. Talal’s pale face flushed crimson as he recalled his shame at disappointing his family. Eager to escape the weight of their expectations, he took a job in Riyadh. When he announced that he would be moving, his father responded, “You know all Saudis like boys, and you are white. Take care.” Talal was pleased to find a measure of truth in his father’s warning—his fair skin made him a hit among the locals.

Marcos, a 41-year-old from the Philippines, was arrested in 1996 for attending a party featuring a drag show. He spent nine months in prison, where he got 200 lashes, before being deported. Still, he opted to return; he loves his work in fashion, which pays decently, and the social opportunities are an added bonus. “Guys romp around and parade in front of you,” he told me. “They will seduce you. It’s up to you how many you want, every day.”

‘GULF ARAB LOVE’

One evening in Jeddah after a sandstorm, I sat in the glass rotunda of a café on Tahlia Street. I’d spent many nights there, interviewing men who were too nervous about being caught with a woman to invite me to their apartments. In a country with no cinemas or clubs or bars, the family sections of cafés and restaurants are popular dating haunts, and during my time in Saudi Arabia, I saw many heterosexual couples talking quietly together, while the girl’s cover—her girlfriends—sat nearby.

On this occasion, I was accompanied by Misfir, 34, who was showing me how to navigate Paltalk, a Web site similar to the one where he met his boyfriend three and a half years ago. Misfir told me that “bottoms”—men willing to be penetrated—are in short supply, and he advised me that if I wanted to generate responses to my postings, I should come up with a screen name that hinted at such

willingness. We settled on “jedbut,” and I logged on to the “Gulf Arab Love” chat room, introducing myself as a bottom.

Within minutes, I had more admirers than I could handle. They dispensed with small talk, asking for my “ASL”—age, size, and location—without preamble. “Jeddah_bythesea” cited his private dimensions and sent electronic “nudges” when I was slow to respond. “Jedbuilt” pressed me to continue the conversation by phone, but I was distracted by the flirty attentions of “jed-to-heart.” However, jed-to-heart’s tone changed when I revealed I was a journalist:

JED-TO-HEART: I lie

JEDBUT: who do you lie to?

JED-TO-HEART: I lie in my work

JED-TO-HEART: with my family

JED-TO-HEART: but I’m gay

JED-TO-HEART: I can’t say I’m gay

JEDBUT: is that hard? to lie? do you tell people you like women?

JED-TO-HEART: that why I lie

JEDBUT: what do you think your family will do if they find out?

JED-TO-HEART: yes

JEDBUT: are you married?

JED-TO-HEART: ohhhhhhhhhhhhh I think I will kill myself

He went on to write that he kept his sexual preference a secret from just about everyone, including his wife of five years.

Back in Gulf Arab Love the next day, I encountered “Anajedtop,” who said he liked both men and women; he too was married. I told him I was a journalist, and we chatted for a bit. I asked him if we could meet. He was hesitant, but he seemed curious to find out whether I was for real. We arranged to get together that evening at the Starbucks on Tahlia Street. I waited for him in the family section, which opens out onto the mall and is surrounded by a screen of plants. A mall guard patrolled just outside. At first, Anajedtop avoided my eyes, directing his comments to my male interpreter. “I went in [the chat room] to get an idea of the bad people in those rooms so that God will keep me away from those kinds of things,” he said, his leg jiggling nervously. He abandoned this weak cover story as our conversation progressed.

He claimed to prefer women, though he admitted that few women frequent the Gulf Arab Love chat room. In the absence of women, he said, he’d “go with” a guy. “I go in and put up an offer,” he said. “I set the tone. I’m in control.” To be in control, for Anajedtop, meant to be on top. “It’s not in my nature to be a bottom,” he said. I asked him whether he was gay, and he responded, “No! A gay is against the norm.

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I can understand. I can write a letter.
I can fill out a job application.
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Because I can read,
I can learn. I can help my daughter
with her homework,
I can inspire her to be better.
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contribute. I can live
my life without fear,
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Anybody can be a top, but only a gay can be a bottom.” He added, “The worst thing is to be a bottom.”

The call to prayer sounded over a loudspeaker, and his leg began shaking more insistently; he put a hand on his knee in a futile attempt to still it. The guard hovered. “I’m worried the *mutawwa’in* might come,” Anajedtop said, and rushed off to catch the evening prayer.

WHAT IS ‘GAY’?

In *The History of Sexuality*, a multivolume work published in the 1970s and ’80s, Michel Foucault proposed his famous thesis that Western academic, medical, and political discourse of the 18th and 19th centuries had produced the idea of the homosexual as a deviant type: In Western society, homosexuality changed from being a behavior (what you *do*) to an identity (who you *are*).

In the Middle East, however, homosexual behavior remained just that—an act, not an orientation. That is not to say that Middle Eastern men who had sex with other men were freely tolerated. But they were not automatically labeled deviant. The taxonomy revolved around the roles of top and bottom, with little stigma attaching to the top. “‘Sexuality’ is distinguished not between ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual’ but between taking pleasure and submitting to someone (being used for pleasure),” the sociologist Stephen O. Murray explains in the 1997 compilation *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*. Being a bottom was shameful because it meant playing a woman’s role. A bottom was not locked into his inferior status, however; he could, and was expected to, leave the role behind as he grew older. “There may be a man, and he likes boys. The Saudis just look at this as, ‘He doesn’t like football,’” Dave, a gay American teacher who first moved to Saudi Arabia in 1978, told me. “It’s assumed that he is, as it were, the dominant partner, playing the man’s role, and there is no shame attached to it.” Nor is the dominant partner considered gay.

However much this may seem like sophistry, it is in keeping with a long-standing Muslim tradition of accommodating homosexual impulses, if not homosexual identity. In 19th-century Iran, a young beardless adolescent was considered an object of beauty—desired by men—who would grow naturally into an older bearded man who desired youthful males. There, as in much of the Islamic world, sexual practices were “not considered fixed

into lifelong patterns of sexual orientation,” as Afsaneh Najmabadi demonstrates in her 2005 book, *Women With Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*. A man was expected to marry, and as long as he fulfilled his procreative obligations, the community didn’t probe his extracurricular activities.

A magazine editor in Jeddah told me that many boys in Mecca, where he grew up, have sexual relations with men, but they don’t see themselves as gay. Abubaker Bagader, a human-rights activist based in Jeddah, explained that homosexuality can be viewed as a phase. “Homosexuality is considered something one might pass by,” he said. “It’s to be understood as a stage of life, particularly at youth.”

This view of sexual behavior, in combination with the strict segregation of the sexes, serves to foster homosexual acts, shifting the stigma onto bottoms and allowing older men to excuse their younger behavior—their time as bottoms—as mere youthful transgressions.

In *Islamic Homosexualities*, the anthropologist Will Roscoe shows that this “status-differentiated pattern”—whereby it’s OK to be a top but not a bottom—has its roots in Greco-Roman culture, and he emphasizes that the top-bottom power dynamic is commonly expressed in relations between older men and younger boys. Yasmin, the student who told me about the lesbian enclave at her college, said that her 16-year-old brother, along with many boys his age, has been targeted by his male elders as a sexual object. “It’s the land of sand and sodomites,” she said. “The older men take advantage of the little boys.”

Dave, the American educator, puts it this way: “Let’s say there’s a group of men sitting around in a café. If a smooth-faced boy walks by, they all stop and make approving comments. They’re just noting, ‘That’s a hot little number.’”

THE PEOPLE OF LOT

Yet a paradox exists at the heart of Saudi conceptions of gay sex and sexual identity: Despite their seemingly flexible view of sexuality, most of the Saudis I interviewed, including those men who identify themselves as gay, consider sodomy a grave sin. During Ramadan, my Jeddah tour guide, Yasser, abstains from sex. His sense of propriety is widely shared: Few gay parties occur in the country during the holy month. Faith is a “huge confusion” for gay Muslims, Yasser and others



FRANCIS, in drag, the winner of a private beauty pageant held by Filipinos in Jeddah

told me. “My religion says it’s forbidden, and to practice this kind of activity, you’ll end up in hell,” he explains. But Yasser places hope in God’s merciful nature. “God forgives you if, from the inside, you are very pure,” he said. “If you have guilt all the time while you’re doing this stuff, maybe God might forgive you. If you practice something forbidden and keep it quiet, God might forgive you.” Zahar, a 41-year-old Saudi who has traveled widely throughout the world, urged me not to write about Islam and homosexuality; to do so, he said, is to cut off debate, because “it’s always the religion that holds people back.” He added, “The original points of Islam can never be changed.” Years ago, Zahar went to the library to ascertain just what those points are. What he found surprised him. “Strange enough, there is no certain condemnation for that [homosexual] act in Islam. On the other hand, to have illegal sex between a man and a woman, there are very clear rules and sub-rules.”

Indeed, the Koran does not contain rules about homosexuality, says Everett K. Rowson, a professor at New York University who is working on a book about homosexuality in medieval Islamic society. “The only passages that deal with the subject unambiguously appear in the passages dealing with Lot.”

The punishment for it is later spelled out: 100 lashes for each party. The Koran does not offer such direct guidance on what to do about sodomy. Many Islamic scholars analogize the act to *zina* to determine a punishment, and some go so far as to say the two sins are the same.

Two other key verses deal with sexual transgression. The first instructs:

If any of your women / are guilty of lewdness, /
take the evidence of four / (reliable) witnesses from
amongst / you/ against them; and if they testify, /
confine [the women] to houses until / death do claim
them, / or God ordain them / some (other) way.

But what is this “lewdness”? Is it *zina* or lesbianism? It is hard to say. The second verse is also ambiguous:

If two men among you / are guilty of lewdness, /
punish them both. / If they repent and amend, / leave
them alone ...

In Arabic, the masculine “dual pronoun” can refer to two men or to a man and a woman. So again—sodomy, or *zina*?

A policy of official denial but tacit acceptance leaves space for change, the possibility that gay men will abandon their sinful ways.

The story of Lot is rendered in the Koran much as it is in the Old Testament. The men of Lot’s town lust after male angels under his protection, and he begs them to have sex with his virgin daughters instead:

Do ye commit lewdness / such as no people / in cre-
ation (ever) committed / before you? For ye practice
your lusts / on men in preference / to women: ye are
indeed / a people transgressing beyond / bounds.

The men refuse to heed him and are punished by a shower of brimstone. Their defiance survives linguistically: In Arabic, the “top” sodomite is *luti*, meaning “of [the people of] Lot.”

This surely suggests that sodomy is considered sinful, but the Koran’s treatment of the practice contrasts with its discussions of *zina*—sexual relations between a man and a woman who are not married to each other. *Zina* is explicitly condemned:

Nor come nigh to adultery: / for it is a shameful
(deed) / and an evil, opening to the road / (to other
evils).

For many centuries, Rowson says, these verses were widely thought to pertain to *zina*, but since the early 20th century, they have been largely assumed to proscribe homosexual behavior. He and most other scholars in the field believe that at about that time, Middle Eastern attitudes toward homosexuality fundamentally shifted. Though same-sex practices were considered taboo, and shameful for the bottom, same-sex desire had long been understood as a natural inclination. For example, Aby Nuwaf—a famous eighth-century poet from Baghdad—and his literary successors devoted much ink to the charms of attractive boys. At the turn of the century, Islamic society began to express revulsion at the concept of homosexuality, even if it was confined only to lustful thoughts, and this distaste became more pronounced with the influx of Western media. “Many attitudes with regard to sexual morality that are thought to be identical to Islam owe a lot more to Queen Victoria” than to the Koran, Rowson told me. “People don’t know—or they try to keep it under the carpet—that 200 years ago, highly respected religious scholars in the Middle East were writing poems about beautiful boys.”

Even Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab—the 18th-century religious scholar who founded Wahhabism—

seems to draw a distinction between homosexual desires and homosexual acts, according to Natana DeLong-Bas, the author of *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (2004). The closest Abd al-Wahhab came to touching upon the topic of homosexuality was in a description of an effeminate man who is interested in other men at a wedding banquet. His tone here is tolerant rather than condemnatory; as long as the man controls his urges, no one in the community has the right to police him.

Religious scholars have turned to the hadith—the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammad—to supplement the Koran’s scant teachings about sodomy and decide on a punishment. There are six canonical collections of hadith, the earliest recorded two centuries after Muhammad’s death. The two most authoritative collections, Rowson says, don’t mention sodomy. In the remaining four, the most important citation reads: “Those whom

you find performing the act of the people of Lot, kill both the active and the passive partner.” Though some legal schools reject this hadith as unreliable, most scholars of Hanbalism, the school of legal thought that underpins the official law of the Saudi kingdom, accept it. It may have provided the authority for the execution this February. (Judges will go out of their way to avoid finding that an act of sodomy has occurred, however.)

‘DON’T ASK, DON’T TELL’

The gay men I interviewed in Jeddah and Riyadh laughed when I asked them if they worried about being executed. Although they do fear the *mutawwa’in* to some degree, they believe the House of Saud isn’t interested in a widespread hunt of homosexuals. For one thing, such an effort might expose members of the royal family to awkward scrutiny. “If they wanted to arrest all the gay people in Saudi Arabia,” Misfir, my

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Accept the things you cannot change:
the bleating clock,
the nightly go
—dog leash in tow—
around the block,

neural chemistry,
patchy hair,
a longing stare
and X-ray eye,

and the niggling fact
that things will stay
roughly this way,
to be exact.

Forgive the things you cannot have:
the supple bod,
taut undergrads,
a nicer pad,
long chats with God,

an older name,
your peers’ respect,
the old korrekt,
unbridled fame,

a sense of ease
in your own skin,
a lighter burden
by degrees.

The life you’d swap for on the train
(sight unseen)
is much like yours
though it appears
more green.

So, why this pain
that shorts the breath
and spoils your health?
You grow serene—

not yet, but after
your will resigns
a few more times
with heavy laughter.

—DAVID YEZZI

David Yezzi is the executive editor of *The New Criterion*. His most recent collection of poems is *The Hidden Model* (2003).

chat-room guide, told me—repeating what he says was a police officer's comment—"they'd have to put a fence around the whole country."

In addition, the power of the *mutawwa'in* is limited by the Koran, which frowns upon those who intrude on the privacy of others in order to catch them in sinful acts. The mandate of the Committee on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice is specifically to regulate behavior in the public realm. What occurs behind closed doors is between a believer and God.

This seems to be the way of the kingdom: essentially, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Private misbehavior is fine, as long as public decorum is observed. Cinemas are forbidden, but people watch pirated DVDs. Drinking is illegal, but alcohol flows at parties. Women wrap their bodies and faces in layers of black, but pornography flourishes. Gay men thrive in this atmosphere. "We really have a very comfortable life," said Zahar, the Saudi who asked me not to write about homosexuality and Islam. "The only thing is the outward showing. I can be flamboyant in my house, but not outside."

This strikes many Saudis as a reasonable accommodation. Court records in Saudi Arabia are generally closed, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the *mutawwa'in* are most likely to punish men who are overtly effeminate—those whose public behavior advertises a gayness that others keep private.

Filipinos, who have little influence and less familiarity with the demands of a double life, seem to be especially vulnerable. When I asked Jamie, the Filipino who says he gets followed down the street by Saudi men, whether he was gay, he answered, with a high giggle, "Obviously!" But he has paid a price for his flamboyant manner. He used to wear his thick black hair down to his shoulders, concealing it with a baseball cap in public, until recently, when he ran into a man in a shortened *thawb* at a coffee shop. The *mutawwa* asked for his work permit. Even though he produced one, Jamie was shoved into an SUV and driven to a police station.

"Are you gay?" a police officer asked after pulling off Jamie's cap and seeing his long hair. "Of course not," Jamie said. He challenged the cop to find a violation, and the officer confirmed the *mutawwa's* report that Jamie was wearing makeup, dressing like a woman, and flirting. After spending a night in jail, Jamie was taken to *mutawwa'in* headquarters in Jeddah, and a *mutawwa* interrogated him again. When he tried to defend himself, the *mutawwa* asked him to walk, and Jamie strode across the room in what he considered a manly fashion. He was eventually allowed to call his boss, who secured his release. Jamie cut his hair—not out of fear, he says, but because he didn't want to bother his boss a second time.

Jamie laughed as he told me of his attempts at dissimulation; though the stakes can be high, efforts to

stamp out homosexuality here often do seem farcical. The *mutawwa'in* get to play the heavies, the government goes through the motions, and the perps play innocent—*Me? Gay?* Few people in the kingdom, other than the *mutawwa'in*, seem to take the process seriously. When the *mutawwa'in* busted the party that led to Marcos's deportation, they separated the "showgirls" wearing drag from the rest of the partygoers, and then asked everyone but the drag queens to line up against the wall for the dawn prayer. At the first of the three ensuing trials, Marcos and the 23 other Filipinos who'd been detained were confronted with the evidence from the party: plastic bags full of makeup, shoes, wigs, and pictures of the defendants dressed like women. When the Filipinos were returned to their cells, they began arguing about who had looked the hottest in the photos. And even after his punishment and deportation, Marcos was unfazed; when he returned to Jeddah, it was under the same name.

The threat of a crackdown always looms, however. In March 2005, the police crashed what they identified as a "gay wedding" in a rented hall near Jeddah; according to some sources, the gathering was only a birthday party. (Similar busts have occurred in Riyadh.) Most of the partygoers were reportedly released without having to do jail time, but the arrests rattled the gay community; at the time of my visit, party organizers were sticking to more-intimate gatherings and monitoring guest lists closely.

THE CLOSETED KINGDOM

To be gay in Saudi Arabia is to live a contradiction—to have license without rights, and to enjoy broad tolerance without the most minimal acceptance. The closet is not a choice; it is a rule of survival.

When I asked Tariq, the 24-year-old in the travel industry, whether his parents suspected he was gay, he responded, "Maybe they feel it, but they have not come up to me and asked me. They don't want to open the door." Stephen Murray, the sociologist, has called this sort of denial "the will not to know"—a phrase that perfectly captures Saudi society's defiant resolve to look the other way. Acknowledging homosexuality would harden a potentially mutable behavior into an identity that contradicts the teachings of Islam, to the extent that Islam deals with the subject. A policy of official denial but tacit acceptance leaves space for change, the possibility that gay men will abandon their sinful ways. Amjad, a gay Palestinian I met in Riyadh, holds out hope that he'll be "cured" of homosexuality, that when his wife receives her papers to join him in Saudi Arabia, he'll be able to break off his relationship with his boyfriend. "God knows what I have in my heart," he said. "I'm trying to do the best I can, obeying the religion. I'm fasting, I'm praying, I'm giving *zakat* [charity]. All the things that God has asked us to do, if I have the ability, I will do it."

Amjad cited a parable about two men living in the same house. The upstairs man was devout and had spent his life praying to God. The downstairs man went to parties, drank, and committed *zina*. One night, the upstairs man had the urge to try what the downstairs man was doing. At the same moment, the downstairs man decided to see what his neighbor was up to. "They died at the stairs," Amjad said. "The one going down went to hell. The one going up went to heaven." For Amjad to accept a fixed identity as a gay man would be to forgo the possibility of ever going upstairs.

But as the Western conception of sexual identity has filtered into the kingdom via television and the Internet, it has begun to blur the Saudi view of sexual behavior as distinct from sexual identity. For example, although Yasser is open to the possibility that he will in time grow attracted to women, he considers himself gay. He says that his countrymen are starting to see homosexual behavior as a marker of identity: "Now that people watch TV all the time, they know what gay people look like and what they do," he explains. "They know if your favorite artist is Madonna and you listen to a lot of music, that means you

and I planned. I don't like to con people, but I had to do that for my family."

In the West, we would expect such subterfuge to exact a high psychological cost. But a closet doesn't feel as lonely when so many others, gay and straight, are in it, too. A double life is the essence of life in the kingdom—everyone has to keep private any deviance from official norms. The expectation that Zahar would maintain a public front at odds with his private self is no greater than the expectations facing his straight peers. Dave, the gay American I met, recalled his surprise when his boyfriend of five years got married, and then asked him to go to the newlyweds' apartment to "make the bed up the way you make it up," for the benefit of the bride. "Saudis will get stressed about things that wouldn't cause us to blink," Dave said. "But having to live a double life, that's just a normal thing."

Most of the gay men I interviewed said that gay rights are beside the point. They view the downsides of life in Saudi Arabia—having to cut your hair, or hide your jewelry, or even spend time in prison for going to a party—as minor aggravations. "When I see a gay parade [in trips to the West], it's too much of a masquerade for attention,"

A closet doesn't feel as lonely when so many others, gay and straight, are in it, too.

are gay." The Jeddah-based magazine editor sees a similar trend. "The whole issue used to be whether that guy was a [top] or a bottom," he told me. "Now people are getting more into the concept of homosexual and straight."

But new recognition of this distinction has not brought with it acceptance of homosexuality: Saudis may be tuning in to *Oprah*, but her tell-all ethic has yet to catch on. Radwan, the Saudi American, came out to his parents only after spending time in the United States—and the experience was so bad that he's gone back into the closet. His father, a Saudi, threatened to kill himself, then decided that he couldn't (because suicide is *haram*), then contemplated killing Radwan instead. "In the end," Radwan told me, "I said, 'I'm not gay anymore. I'm straight.'" Most of his gay peers choose to remain silent within their families. Yasser says that if his mother ever found out he's gay, she would treat him as if he were sick and take him to psychologists to try to find a cure.

Zahar, at 41, has managed the unusual feat of staving off marriage without revealing himself to be gay. Marriage would devastate him, he says, and exposure of his homosexuality would devastate his family. So Zahar has employed an elaborate series of stratagems: a fake girlfriend, a fake engagement to a sympathetic cousin, the breaking off of the engagement. As he put it, "I schemed,

Zahar said. "You don't need that. Women's rights, gay rights—why? Get your rights without being too loud."

Embracing gay identity, generally viewed in the West as the path to fuller rights, could backfire in Saudi Arabia. The idea of being gay, as opposed to simply acting on sexual urges, may bring with it a deeper sense of shame. "When I first came here, people didn't seem to have guilt. They were sort of 'I'll worry about that on Judgment Day,'" Dave said. "Now, with the Internet and Arabia TV, they have some guilt." The magazine editor in Jeddah says that when he visits his neighbors these days, they look back at their past sexual encounters with other men regretfully, thinking, "What the hell were we doing? It's disgusting."

When Radwan arrived in Jeddah, in 1987, after seeing the gay-rights movement in the United States firsthand, he wanted more than the tacit right to quietly do what he chose. "Invisibility gives you the cover to be gay," he said. "But the bad part of invisibility is that it's hard to build a public identity and get people to admit there is such a community and then to give you some rights." He tried to rally the community and encourage basic rights—like the right not to be imprisoned. But the locals took him aside and warned him to keep his mouth shut. They told him, "You've got everything a gay person could ever want." ■

Nadya Labi is a writer based in New York City.

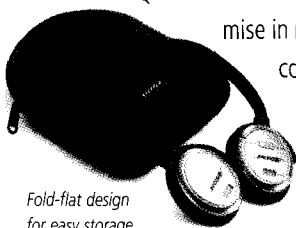
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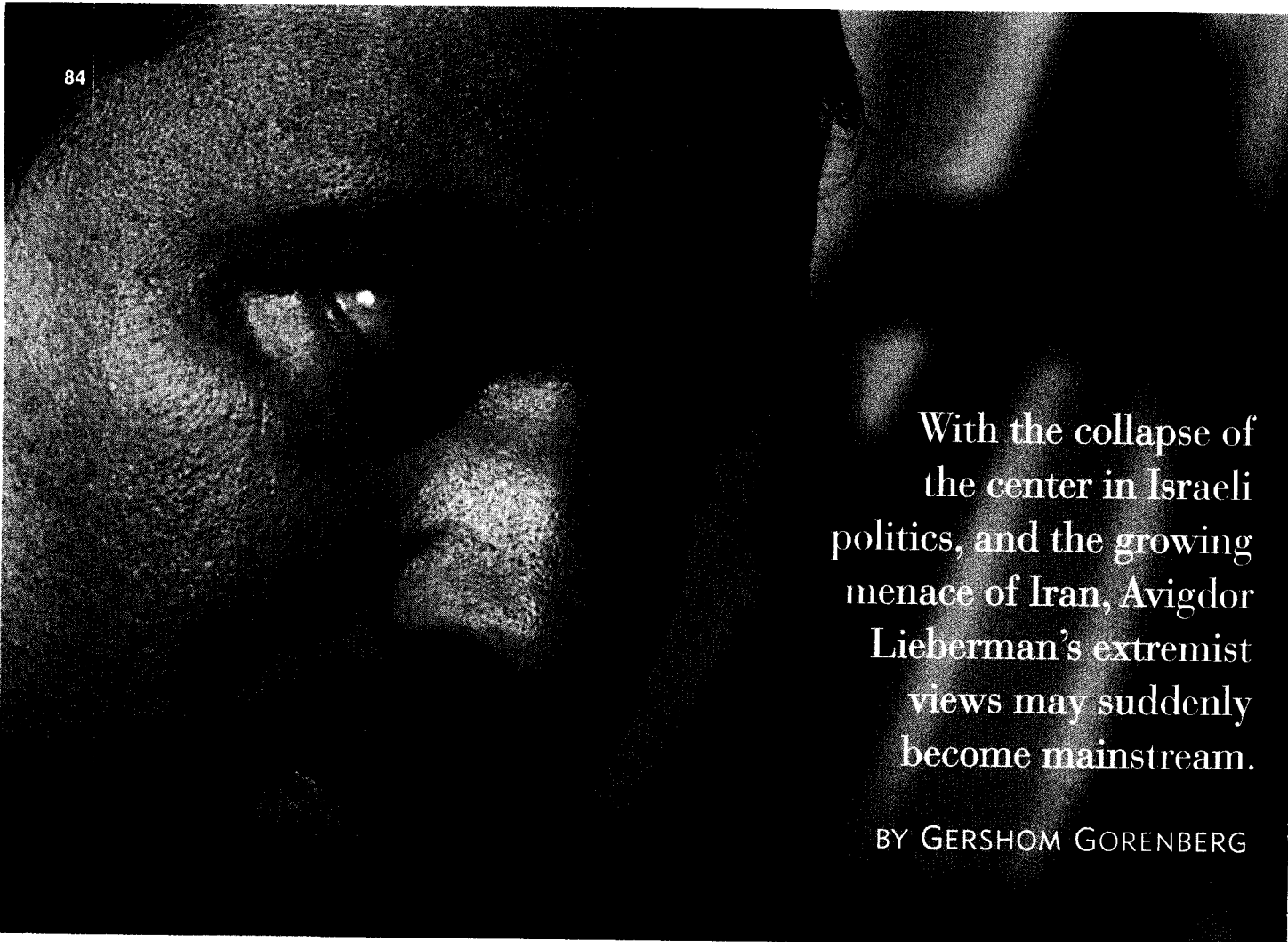
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With the collapse of the center in Israeli politics, and the growing menace of Iran, Avigdor Lieberman's extremist views may suddenly become mainstream.

BY GERSHOM GORENBERG

The Minister for National Fears

Avigdor Lieberman is an oversized man in an undersized room. His beard, remorselessly trimmed to a narrow, graying stripe around his cheeks, frames a wide face with pale, icy eyes. As he speaks, he waves his tiger paw of a hand, holding a cigar the proportions of a small cannon. The cigar is not lit, but the laws of drama say it will be by the third act. In Russian-accented Hebrew, he is talking about his admiration for Peter the Great and Winston Churchill. Before »

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World War II, he says, all the “lovely, liberal, progressive people” threw every insult at Churchill that they now throw at him—“warmonger, embittered, extremist”—except for having a beard and being Russian. He smiles at the thought.

On the small stage of Israeli politics, Avigdor Lieberman is a suddenly large figure. Little more than a year ago, he was the leader of a splinter party of the radical right, excoriated for advocating a program that would disenfranchise and even expel Israel’s Arab citizens. But in an electoral earthquake last March, as Israel’s ruling parties crumbled, Lieberman’s Yisrael Beiteinu (“Israel Is Our Home”) received nearly a tenth of the national vote—a virtual tie with Likud, the party of the respectable right. Lieberman has since joined Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s ruling coalition as minister for strategic affairs.

On paper at least, Lieberman is responsible for coordinating Israel’s response to threats including the Iranian nuclear program and Hezbollah, Iran’s ally in Lebanon. Iran—its nuclear program, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s insistence that Israel will cease to exist, his denial of the Holocaust—features daily on Israel’s front pages. The failure last summer to disarm Hezbollah amplified the public panic. One poll conducted several months after last summer’s war with Lebanon showed that 66 percent of Israelis believed that if Iran got the bomb, it would try to destroy Israel. Lieberman’s newly created post might better be labeled “minister for national fears.”

Yet the fears on which Lieberman focuses are domestic. Israel’s parliamentary system has created instability, he says, tapping a common anxiety after five governments in fewer than 11 years. His answer: revamping the system to give the prime minister nearly unchecked power. The country’s Arab minority is a fifth column, he argues. His answer: removing the minority from the state or from the voting rolls—to transform Israel from a Jewish state to a Jews-only state.

Lieberman’s ascent, say supporters (and some rivals), shows he has moved toward the center. It could just as easily be read as evidence that the center of Israeli politics has collapsed. Olmert and the centrist Kadima movement were casualties of the war in Lebanon last summer. To bolster support in parliament, the prime minister had to offer Lieberman influence over decisions that could shape, and shake, the Middle East. Simply by granting him a ministerial position, Olmert gave legitimacy to hard-line views on internal issues. In December, addressing a convention of his Yisrael Beiteinu, Lieberman declared that his goal was “to be the ruling party” within two elections. When aristocracies fade, a pariah may reign.

Soon after Lieberman’s appointment to the cabinet, I met him in Jerusalem, in his cramped office in Israel’s parliament building. Lieberman dismisses the Israeli

media as “superficial and cynical” for looking for electoral calculations in his decision to join the government. His only goal, he insists, is to protect the country from growing dangers, such as the risk of a new Holocaust at Iran’s hands. “Anyone who draws the lessons from Hitler’s rise [knows Hitler] was telling the truth, and Ahmadinejad is telling the truth,” he says, referring to the Iranian president’s threats against Israel. “All attempts to pacify Hitler ended in World War II, and all attempts to appease Ahmadinejad are doomed to failure.”

The same dark certainty underlies Lieberman’s view of Jews and Palestinians. “Every place in the world where there are two peoples—two religions, two languages—there is friction and conflict,” he asserts. That iron law, he says, pounding his desk, applies to Northern Ireland, Canada, and the Caucasus. The solution is total political division—and so, just as Palestinians seek a state that is “Judenrein,” Israel must be free of a disloyal Arab minority. Otherwise, he says, “linkage ... will clearly exist between Israeli Arabs and the future Palestinian state,” and “the pressure from within and without will blow us apart.”

Lieberman says he “identifies very deeply” with Churchill, who “stuck to his position and let nothing move him ... I like people who swim against the current.” The same qualities draw him to Peter the Great. “At least 300 times” Lieberman has read *Peter the First*, a Soviet-era historical novel describing the 7-foot-tall autocrat who dragged Russia into modern Europe and made it a military power, and he believes himself to be a man, like Peter and Churchill, who sees grim truths and whose foresight will yet be rewarded.

Lieberman was born in Kishinev, in Soviet Moldova, in 1958, the only child of a father who had spent six years in the Red Army and 10 more in forced exile in Siberia—an entirely ordinary history for a Jewish family where he grew up. His strongest memory is of his parents’ insistence on speaking only Yiddish in public. “We’d get on a bus, packed with people, all gentiles ... and every head turned toward us. I was a kid—3, 4 years old—and I had the feeling we were different, something else completely, and that everyone was cursing to himself—‘You Zhids, go to Israel! What are you doing here?’—and [my parents] would speak Yiddish!” It was “a matter of character” and a lesson in defiance.

When he was 20, the family left the Soviet Union. His parents had wanted him to complete an engineering degree, but Lieberman refused to wait. (Waiting, it turned out, would have been costly. In 1980, after a decade in which at least 120,000 Soviet Jews left for Israel, Leonid Brezhnev’s regime shut the gates to emigration.) In Israel, he worked as an airport porter and a nightclub doorman.

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At Hebrew University, he switched to international relations and joined a student party linked to the right-wing Likud. The construction of his schooling—a technical foundation, with politics on top—may explain his view that “the laws of history are the same as the laws of physics”: precise and repetitive.

After graduating, he became a Likud functionary—an immigrant success with a career in the party in power. He and his wife, Ella, a fellow immigrant he’d met in a prep course for university studies, moved to a small West Bank settlement, Nokdim, in the barren hills south-east of Bethlehem. It was an example of the personal as very political in Israel: choosing one’s home to help keep “Judea and Samaria”—the biblical term for the West Bank—permanently in Israeli hands.

In the late 1980s, Lieberman met Benjamin Netanyahu and became his campaign chief. They were both outsiders in Likud, a movement dominated by the sons and daughters of the Israeli revolution—children of the rightist Irgun underground who’d fought both the Arabs and the British before independence. In 1996, Netanyahu was elected prime minister, and Lieberman, just 38, became director-general of the prime minister’s office (equivalent to being chief of staff for a U.S. president).

Lieberman gained a reputation as the enforcer who crushed internal party dissent. A party convention voted to cancel primaries for parliamentary candidates so that the Netanyahu-controlled central committee could choose the ticket. Lieberman’s operatives, it was said, passed out pre-marked ballots to obedient delegates. The epithets for him—“KGB,” “Rasputin”—bespoke fear, and also resentment of someone who had grown up elsewhere. Netanyahu faced open rebellion. In late 1997, Lieberman resigned, apparently sacrificed to satisfy the old elite. In a farewell speech, he attacked those “who think this party is divided into princes and slaves.”

He became his own boss—first in a private business, described by an aide as import-export and by others who know Lieberman as having dealt mainly in the former Eastern Bloc. When Israel went back to the polls in 1999, Lieberman exploited the country’s multiparty system to run on his own ticket. Russian-speaking political insiders suggest that he was tired of being Netanyahu’s messenger boy and, like many on the right, objected to compromises that Netanyahu had made with the Palestinians at the Wye summit, in 1998. His “princes and slaves” remark hints that he had also tired of seeking acceptance in Likud. Instead, he chose to flaunt his immigrant identity.

In the 1990s, Israeli demographics had shifted dramatically. Nearly a million immigrants poured into the country from the former Soviet Union, becoming close to 15 percent of the population. Unlike the earlier

wave, they faced a tough transition. “For many, this was not their real choice,” says Larissa Remennick, a Russian-educated sociologist who arrived in 1991. “They came to the Middle East despite their desire to be in the West.” Remennick, a professor at Bar-Ilan University, outside Tel Aviv, is among the fortunate who found work matching her education. The number of engineers in Israel quadrupled, she says; the number of physicians doubled. Disappointed professionals became semiskilled laborers, sometimes competing with Israel’s Arab underclass. Whole towns turned into immigrant enclaves; a Russian-language press flourished. An immigrant party led by ex-Soviet political prisoner Natan Sharansky helped Netanyahu take power in 1996. Lieberman turned to that constituency, challenging Sharansky as well as Netanyahu. His party’s name, “Israel Is Our Home,” is the loud declaration of those actually not quite at home. Read with the stress on *Our*, it also implies that there are other people in the country who should be considered aliens.

In 1999, Lieberman’s party won four seats in the 120-seat Knesset. The result left him on the political margins, and to bolster his position, he formed an alliance with the far-right National Union. That party, led by a former general, called for the “voluntary transfer” of Palestinians out of the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. Lieberman’s foreign policy was equally strident. In a 2001 meeting with ambassadors from the former Soviet republics, he reportedly said that Israel should attack Egypt’s Aswan Dam or Iran’s capital if threatened, “and we have missiles that reach Tehran.”

More audacious, though, is his new position on the Palestinian question. In 2004, Lieberman suddenly dropped his hard-line opposition to Palestinian independence and declared that he favored partitioning the land now held by Israel between Jews and Palestinians. It was part of a trend: Ehud Olmert, one of the Likud princes, had just come out for unilateral withdrawal from much of the West Bank; Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had announced his plan to pull out of Gaza. A whole slice of the right seemed to accept the left’s argument that Israel could not remain a Jewish and democratic country if it kept the territories it had occupied since 1967, with their unenfranchised Palestinian residents.

Lieberman, though, had his own twist: He proposed that Israel keep its largest West Bank settlements—and cede some of its own territory near the West Bank boundary, areas populated by Arabs who are Israeli citizens and voters. Initially, he spoke of “transferring” Arab citizens from elsewhere in Israel to the new Palestinian state.

“I am definitely speaking of exchanging populations and territory simultaneously, because there is no other solution,” Lieberman said from the Knesset podium in June 2004. From the left-wing benches came constant, angry catcalls.

INSPIRED THINKING IN AN IDYLIC SETTING

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"You're like Stalin, and your transfer is like Stalin's!" shouted the Laborite Yuli Tamir.

Lieberman struggled to return to his prepared text, citing the division of Cyprus into Greek and Turkish sectors as a model. "In the last two decades," he said, "populations have been transferred in Central Europe ... for instance in the Balkans."

The heckling grew.

"I suggest to the left that it go to a democratic country like Syria," Lieberman said.

"You go! What chutzpah! Who are you at all?" answered another heckler, Avshalom Vilan. As a kibbutz member, Vilan is part of an Israeli gentry whose fortunes have faded like those of the antebellum plantation owners in Faulkner's novels. His gibe suggested that Lieberman was beyond the pale socially as well as politically. On other occasions, facing Arab hecklers in the Knesset, Lieberman has caught fire as an orator, shouting and slamming the podium. This time he looked rattled.

Lieberman, though, has stopped speaking of "transfer." Instead, his platform in last year's election called for conditioning citizenship on a loyalty oath to the state, the flag, and the national anthem. The requirement

an investment firm. His office is on the 25th floor of a Tel Aviv high-rise and looks out over the country's most Westernized city toward the Mediterranean. The magazines in the waiting room are all in Hebrew, not Russian; the coffee offered by the receptionist is espresso, the beverage of communion for the Israeli business class. The office proclaims that Bronfman *belongs*. Lieberman, says Bronfman, "understood that his right-wing stance made him—in Russian the word is *izgoi*—an outcast," and has been trying to fit into the new political consensus that wants territorial division and peace. But "he's a racist," Bronfman adds. "He has accepted ending the conflict with Palestinians but has opened a front against the Israeli Arabs."

The citizenship bill is just one piece of Lieberman's plan for remaking Israel. Last year, his party submitted a bill it said would provide a more stable government. Under the proposed law, the prime minister could appoint ministers without parliamentary approval. If the Knesset approved a state of emergency, the cabinet could enact emergency regulations temporarily superseding laws—and if "the prime minister sees that the cabinet cannot be convened, and there is a pressing and vital

"Every place in the world where there are two peoples—two religions, two languages—there is friction and conflict," Lieberman asserts. His solution is total political division.

would apply to "every person reaching adulthood," Yisrael Beitenu's director-general, Faina Kirshenbaum, stressed when I spoke with her. Israel's flag, with its Jewish star, and its anthem describing the "Jewish soul stirring," have long spurred opposition from Israeli Arabs. Under Lieberman's plan, anyone declining the oath would remain a resident but could not vote. Just as his partition plan would draw a sharp geographic border between Jews and Arabs, his citizenship bill would draw a thick black border in Israeli society between those who belong to the polity and those who do not. The Arabs would be outside; the immigrants would be inside. "Such a law is customary in advanced Western countries, chief among them the United States of America," the party platform claims. "I'd say we're more a party of the center" than of the right, Kirshenbaum told me. "We're pragmatic."

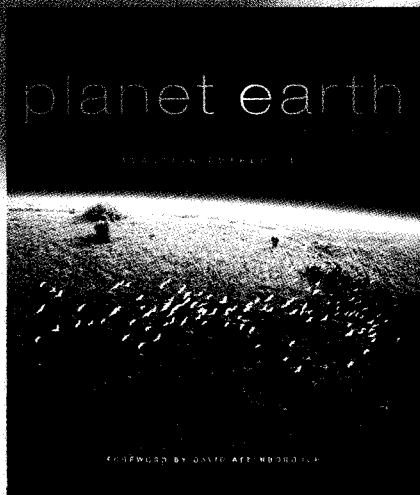
Surprisingly, that view is accepted by Roman Bronfman, who for a decade was the most prominent politician on the dovish side of the Russian-speaking community. Originally from Ukraine, Bronfman came to Israel in 1980 and earned his doctorate in Russian history. After leaving the Knesset last year, he opened

need for emergency regulations, he may enact them." That system, surely, could eliminate much parliamentary dithering.

In last year's election, Lieberman dominated the Russian-speaking immigrant vote. But he also won support from other Israelis disappointed with the establishment right. Under Israel's proportional electoral system, the party gained 11 Knesset seats.

The election followed what Israeli politicians called the "Big Bang." Ariel Sharon's pullout from Gaza had left Likud irreparably divided. Sharon bolted to form the new, centrist Kadima ("Forward") Party. Netanyahu led the rump Likud but lacked a convincing response to the ever-more-pressing Israeli dilemma: Maintaining the occupation seems impossible, but so does negotiating with the Palestinians. When Sharon suffered a stroke, Olmert unexpectedly became Kadima's candidate. His plan for a unilateral pullout from most of the West Bank was one answer to the national question, and Kadima's 22 percent of the national vote made it the largest party in parliament. Lieberman, with his harsher response, received 9 percent and just 116 fewer votes nationally than Netanyahu.

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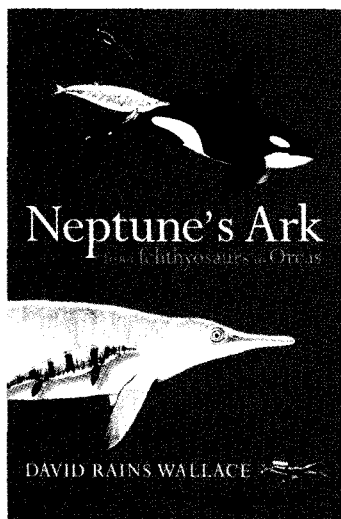
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To rule, Olmert formed a coalition with the shrunken Labor Party. But last summer's fighting completed the razing of the old political establishment. The missile attacks launched on Israeli cities from Gaza and southern Lebanon—from which Israel withdrew in 2000—discredited unilateral pullbacks. No mainstream ideology was left standing. Instead of risking early elections, Olmert brought Lieberman into his coalition. Laborites who had once insulted Lieberman agreed to sit at the cabinet table with him rather than risk facing the voters.

"The one consensus on which this government was built was disengagement from the West Bank, and it has become irrelevant," says Lev Grinberg, a political sociologist at Ben-Gurion University, in Beersheba. In that vacuum, Lieberman "appears as someone who knows the solution. He doesn't equivocate; he doesn't fudge." For Grinberg, this is a clear and present danger to Israeli society. For Lieberman, it is simply the opportunity given to a man who knows what he believes.

"To drag the people out of the age-old swamp, open their eyes, prod them in the ribs. Beat them, lick them into shape, teach them"—so the czar describes his life's mission in the novel *Peter the First*. Coming to power at the end of the 17th century, Peter is heir to a backward, Asiatic

himself in a czar who required cruelty to bring progress. The author became a favorite of the regime.

"Whenever I am tired or upset and I want something to calm me," says Lieberman of *Peter the First*, "I open it on any page and start to read ... One cannot understand modern Russia without reading this book." Nor, perhaps, can one understand Lieberman.

If Israel's former generals, rival politicians, and security analysts agree on anything about Iran, it's that Avigdor Lieberman is the wrong person to address the threat. But they reassure themselves that he has no real power. While his job description includes "coordinating all security and intelligence branches," it also says his appointment does not detract from the authority of the defense and foreign ministers. And ultimately, the buck stops at the prime minister. "Olmert gave him a nice title ... [Lieberman] is in charge of talking," Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh told me.

Leaning back in his chair in his Knesset office, Lieberman waves away such talk. "The threats against Israel are growing," he tells me. "How much time does the prime minister have to devote to them? He has to deal with coalition problems, with the budget ..." Lieberman,

"All attempts to pacify Hitler ended in World War II, and all attempts to appease Ahmadinejad are doomed to failure."

Russia dominated by nobles who only pray and sleep. Peter takes European merchants as his mentors. Among his countrymen, he prefers peasant-born adventurers to the nobles. "The heroes considered that their glory lay in war," a European friend tells him, and Peter embraces the advice. From the Ottomans he wrests a southern port; from Sweden, the Baltic coast.

Reading the novel, you identify with Peter, yet he is terrifying. When he faces a counterrevolution, "The prisons were filled and thousands of new corpses swayed ... on the walls of Moscow." The czar himself participates in the torture of the conspirators. Just as frightening are the Old Believers, who regard the reforming Peter as the Antichrist. Rather than accept the new order, they prefer to baptize themselves in flames and go "straight to heaven."

Peter the First stops in mid-story—cut short by the death, in 1945, of the author, Alexey Tolstoy, a distant cousin of the author of *War and Peace*. The book was a gamble, says Helen Tolstoy, Alexey's granddaughter and biographer, who teaches Russian literature at Hebrew University. Her grandfather wrote the book, she says, "as if telling Stalin and the Bolsheviks ... that we want a progressive, Western country." Yet Stalin saw some of

though, *will* have the time, and having a policy proposal when others do not is power. This is how Israeli cabinets have made some of the country's most crucial decisions in the past.

Israel's conflict with the Palestinians, Lieberman says, is just one front in the clash of civilizations. The Iranian problem is another part of the collision of the free world and extreme Islam. The Cold War strategy of mutually assured destruction will not work against Mahmoud Ahmadinejad or Osama bin Laden, he argues. Bin Laden "wants all the infidels to become believers ... to send them to heaven. Likewise Ahmadinejad." The world has the tools to stop Iran, he says, but "I'm afraid that at the end of the day, we will be alone ... Our experience from the Second World War is the same. In the Holocaust, everybody knew the facts, but we paid the price."

Lieberman is not ready yet to say how Israel should face the external threat. But he has already laid his solutions on the table to what he sees as Israel's internal problems. He speaks quietly, in a low growl, and in his hand the cigar is lit. ■

Gershon Gorenberg is the author of, most recently, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967–1977* (2006).

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Why is anonymous group suicide
so popular in Japan?

BY DAVID SAMUELS

Let's Die Together

I

THE DEATH CARS OF SAITAMA

On March 10, 2006, a car was discovered in a lightly wooded area of Saitama, a suburban prefecture near Tokyo. The windows had been taped shut. What the investigating officers who were called to the scene found was all too familiar: a plastic bag containing traces of crushed sleeping pills, and a row of charcoal burners that had sucked the oxygen from the car, asphyxiating the five young men and one woman inside. ¶ When I turned up at the Saitama police headquarters two weeks later, I was greeted by a spindly middle-aged spokesman who at first refused to answer any questions about the most recent case of group suicide in his prefecture. His gray »



suit and black-framed glasses, and the double row of ballpoint pens in his shirt pocket, gave him the exaggerated geeky appearance of a manga character. During my first two weeks in Japan, five cars filled with dead bodies were discovered in the woods around Tokyo. It is a sign of how familiar these macabre cases have become that none merited more than a passing mention in the local newspapers.

"We do not know if the victims were familiar with each other or how they became familiar," the police spokesman said, holding his briefcase firmly on his lap. Unlike murder, suicide is not a crime, so investigators find it difficult to justify pursuing these cases. "Indeed," he continued, "as of today, 15 days after the fact, we are not aware of how they came to know each other, nor has there been any evident violation of law related to this incident, although the investigation is ongoing."

From 2003 through 2005, 180 people died in 61 reported cases of Internet-assisted group suicide in Japan. (No statistics have so far been made public for 2006.) All but two of these cases have proceeded according to a common blueprint: The victims meet online, using

anonymous screen names, and then take sleeping pills and use briquettes, charcoal burners, and tape to turn a car or van into a mobile gas chamber.

The first official report of the deaths in Saitama, filed at 12:30 p.m. on March 10, indicates that residents of the village of Chichibu informed the local police that a car with six bodies had been found on a dirt road nearby. In the driver's seat, police reports stated blandly, was a male, 20 to 30 years old, with long hair, a checkered shirt, and blue jeans. Next to him was a woman in her 20s wearing a brown coat and brown skirt, and on her left, a man in his 20s in a black jacket and jeans. The driver and the man in the black jacket both worked as clerks. The woman was an unemployed 28-year-old from the provincial city of Fukuoka. In the backseat were a male in his 20s with "normal hair" who wore black jeans and had worked as an architect in Saitama; an unemployed male in his 20s in a red jacket; and a 21-year-old male with longish hair, in a black jacket and blue jeans, who was employed as a shop assistant in Kanagawa. All they appeared to have in common was that they were in their 20s, had access to the Internet, and had met online for the purpose of dying together in a car.

As I looked over the files at a teahouse near the police station, I was joined by a young reporter from Saitama who had been covering Internet-related group suicide for the Mainichi newspapers. He began working the suicide beat on February 11, 2003, when, in the first case recorded by government statisticians, three people killed themselves in Iruma City by burning charcoal briquettes in an empty apartment. The victims were a 26-year-old man named Michio Sakai, who was troubled by his inability to find work, and two 24-year-old women he had met on an Internet site called "Group Suicide Bulletin Board," which he had opened the previous year.

"Where did they get the idea of using charcoal?" I asked.

"There were rumors on the Internet that to die from briquettes was to die in your sleep," the young reporter, handsome and open-faced, with a touch of adolescent acne, explained. "It was a very painless way to go."

The death site was a traditional tatami room, with a plastic sheet laid down to preserve the mats. Smoldering charcoal burners had been placed in each corner, and the bodies were lying parallel in the center of the room. The women had brought sleeping bags to protect themselves from the cold; all three wore ski goggles to keep the smoke from their eyes.

"I just didn't get it," the reporter said. "How could you end your life with someone you'd never even met before?"

II

THE PERFECT SUICIDE

Suicide, which Shakespeare called "self-slaughter" and which is known in Christian teaching as "the sin against the Holy Ghost," occupies a very different place in the imagination of the West than it does in Japan, where self-disembowelment with a specialized blade has long been considered a proper response to shame or dishonor. In his classic study *Suicide*, the French sociologist Emile Durkheim drew a sharp distinction between suicide in Western Europe and what he saw as the "altruistic" forms of suicide prevalent in Japan. A grim twist on Durkheim's notion was provided during World War II by kamikaze pilots, who pioneered suicide bombing as a tactic of modern warfare. Japan's three most prominent postwar writers—the Nobel laureates Yasunari Kawabata and Kenzaburo Oe, and Kawabata's famous student, the novelist Yukio Mishima—have been preoccupied with suicide. Kawabata and Mishima each died by his own hand.

Japanese authorities have been slow to react with any notable alarm to a recent nationwide embrace of death that has caused the official suicide rate to increase by an average of about 5 percent a year for the past decade. More than 32,500 suicides were reported in 2005; because insurance benefits tend to be denied to the dead person's family, many suicides are recorded as accidents. On two occasions during

my 10 weeks in Tokyo, I was startled out of my rush-hour daze by the matter-of-fact voice of an announcer apologizing to riders for a delay in service caused by a "human-related incident," the officially sanctioned euphemism used when a commuter has jumped in front of a train. Cases like these are often reported as accidents rather than suicides. The only countries with higher official suicide rates are Sri Lanka, which is mired in an unending civil war, and the former Soviet republics and their Eastern European satellites, where economic disaster and profound political changes have combined to produce the kind of social disintegration otherwise associated with catastrophic military defeat.

Many Japanese blame the rising suicide rate on the collapse of the "bubble economy" in the early 1990s, which threw hundreds of thousands out of work and led many families to take on unaccustomed and unsustainable levels of debt, often at extortionate (but legal) interest rates as high as 40 percent. Yet even as the economy has markedly improved, the suicide rate has continued to rise. Meanwhile, the Japanese total fertility rate has plummeted, reaching a Spenglerian sub-replacement level of 1.3 children per woman, among the lowest in the history of the industrialized world.

The most spectacular manifestation of Japan's exploding suicide culture, Internet group suicide, is unique in that it is rooted in the technologies of the computer age and has no meaningful precedent in traditional Japanese social behavior. In the summer of 2004, Japan decided to address this disturbing new phenomenon in a peculiarly modern Japanese fashion, through an informal series of meetings convened by the Internet providers' consortium at the suggestion of the National Police, an advisory body that makes procedural recommendations to local prefectures but lacks enforcement powers of its own. Back in Tokyo, I met with Kazuhiko Yoshida, the young brush-haired chief of the National Police's cyber-crime division, which is in charge of establishing national policy on a range of problems, from spam to fraud, copyright violation, and child pornography.

"In the first six months, there were about seven or eight official meetings to decide whether we should have guidelines," Yoshida explained. "Then another seven or eight meetings were held until the October release of the guidelines that were finally decided on." For the guidelines to be triggered, the cyber-crime chief explained, an individual must use the word *death* and express the desire to die. He or she must also name the place of death and the method by which the suicide will be effected. The conversation must take place on a bulletin board specifically devoted to suicide. If all these criteria are met, the police have the right to ask the Internet provider for registration and credit-card information. So far, Yoshida proudly revealed, a grand total of 12 group-suicide attempts had been stopped as a result of the new guidelines.

To the extent that the popular revival of suicide culture can be traced to any single event, this would be the publication, in 1993, of *The Perfect Suicide Manual*, a book by Wataru Tsurumi, a Tokyo University graduate and publishing-industry dropout. Tsurumi is an obsessive who professes a Nabokovian indifference to the consequences of publishing his work. In a culture where conformity is expected and geeks have a surprising amount of cultural power, he is a charismatic figure who has attained the kind of celebrity status usually reserved in Japan for pop stars or cartoon characters.

To date, *The Perfect Suicide Manual* has provided more than 2 million despairing or simply curious Japanese souls with technically explicit instructions on how to take their lives by 10 methods including hanging, electrocution, drug overdose, asphyxiation, and self-immolation. Tsurumi's book contains tips about the best

Like suicide terrorism in Iraq and elsewhere in the Muslim world, Japanese group suicide cannot be explained as a simple by-product of poverty, lack of education, or other common social ills. Many suicide victims went to good schools, had decent jobs, were raised in two-parent families, and could be seen as ordinary citizens of Asia's safest and richest democracy. What Japanese and Arab Muslim cultures have in common is a powerful aversion to shame and a deep undercurrent of sympathy for martyrs. Those who embrace death can cancel out shame and dishonor and even become heroes through actions that make Western individualists shudder.

When suicide-positive cultures meet the Internet, those inhibitions that do exist are weakened. The spread of Internet communications makes it easy for suicide seekers, radical Islamists, pedophiles, and other fringe groups to meet online, away from the prying eyes of par-

“There’s nothing bad about suicide. We have no religion or laws here in Japan telling us otherwise.”

places to commit suicide, accounts of famous celebrity suicides, and assorted cartoons, whose effect is to suggest that suicide is easy and painless, a common, socially acceptable activity. Tsurumi sold his book to a movie studio, spawning a successful splatter film, which was followed by a sequel. He is now a highly paid celebrity speaker and a fixture on the international youth-culture circuit. As he told one inquiring reporter, “There’s nothing bad about suicide. We have no religion or laws here in Japan telling us otherwise. As for group suicides, before the Internet, people would write letters, or make phone calls ... it’s always been part of our culture.”

Tsurumi’s unapologetic justification of his gruesome book did not sound strange at all to Japanese readers. Whereas in the West, suicide is generally seen as the needless act of desperate souls, or of the terminally ill, in Japan it is understood as a more or less rational decision that can be taken by perfectly sane individuals as well as by groups. Japan has a long history of families committing suicide together, as well as suicides by cults and militaristic groups, including kamikaze pilots, or samurai warriors who suffered dishonor and hoped to wipe the slate clean. What is shocking about the new suicide epidemic is not so much that it is a group activity as that people are choosing to kill themselves together with total strangers. *The Perfect Suicide Manual* has become the essential text of a decentralized death cult that takes orders from no one, and whose members meet on Web sites designed solely to support and strengthen their common intention to die.

ents, spouses, and the police. Once online, it is easy for such groups to attract new members from the free-floating population of lonely, curious, or dissatisfied souls who exist in all times and places, and in all cultures. Instead of spending their time in prayer, or listening to sad music, or reading novels, or knitting, or taking care of too many cats, vulnerable and unstable members of society are socialized into virtual communities whose shared vocabulary and values become an antidote to loneliness, even as they propel their members toward death.

Logging on to the popular Japanese Web site 2Channel any night of the week, one can watch in real time as individuals meet online in the hope of finding suitable companions in death. On a more or less typical night, on a site called “Let’s die together in Shizuoka” (a city an hour from Tokyo on the bullet train), I sit in front of my computer screen and watch as the death script is rehearsed and elaborated by anonymous participants, some of whom may simply be exploring a radical idea, while others may soon be found dead in cars:

1. MOON: I don’t have any equipment ready, but my mind is ready to die anytime. I failed to commit suicide once in the past when I thought I should turn over a new leaf and try my hand at life again. But the black shadow in my heart remains. I’m always tired now. I want to go to sleep, never to wake up ... I’m seeking someone who would come along to death’s river with me, with coal suicide ...

3. HIROPON: I left home, nowhere to go back, I have no job, and my money is running out. I have nothing good in my life right now. If something good happens to me just one more time, and I am still thinking about death, then it will be time for me to die.

4. MOON: Dear Hiropon-san, Is it too selfish of me to ask you to let me know your e-mail address? Please say no if you don't want to, and then I'll tell you mine first. But if you don't mind, let me know yours first ...

9. A MIDDLE-AGED MAN: If you are still young and living with your parents, you shouldn't commit suicide. But me, I'm a middle-aged man, in debt, no money, health problems, no job. Nothing in my life will improve if I stay alive. I guess I will either commit suicide, or die together with somebody who is garbage like me. When we get older, nobody stops us ...

12. TAKA: How do you do, MOON-san, I live in Shizuoka as well. We can buy coals and a brazier at a home-center. All we would need then are sleeping pills. Let me join you ...

31. MOON: My wish for death increases in inverse proportion to the speed of this conversation ... If I'm told "We'll die tomorrow, but there's one more seat open. Would you like to come?" I would nod my head in a very casual way, as if to make an appointment to go out with a friend.

III

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION

The most influential Japanese cultural product of the last decade is an animated cartoon series called *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, originally broadcast on national television during 1995 and 1996; it has shaped the psyches of Japanese under 40 like nothing in recent Western cultural experience except perhaps the Beatles and the first *Star Wars* movies. The series, produced by a collective called Gainax and directed by the cult animator Hideaki Anno, is a dark, fractured narrative of the postapocalyptic adventures of four badly damaged young kids who join with powerful new technologies to save what remains of the Earth from the Angels, 17 heavenly immortals who spread terror and destruction and seek to bring about the end of humankind.

Distinguished less by the quality of its animation than by its dark subject matter, nonlinear storytelling, and heavy, depressive stoner vibe, the series is regularly praised by animators, novelists, cultural theorists, and visual artists as the flower of Japanese pop culture. It has been credited with defining gender roles, influencing attitudes toward the environment, and spawning the madly

obsessive—and immensely profitable—*otaku* subculture embraced by tens of thousands of geeky fans who spend their lives unraveling the larger message of the show and collecting pornographic comic books featuring the show's female characters.

In person, Hideaki Anno, dressed in a military-green jumpsuit and black boots, slouches deep in his battered office couch and glowers. In a country where conformity is still a virtue, Anno stands out on account of his curly black hair and large, cauliflower-shaped ears, which, in combination with his jumpsuit, give him the appearance of an angry hobbit in black-rimmed glasses. Before creating his famous anime, Anno went through a four-year-long depression, during which he did no work and spent most of his time alone in his room. In 2003, Gainax sold the live-action rights to *Neon Genesis Evangelion* to a film producer that is collaborating with Weta Workshop, a company whose principals include *Lord of the Rings* director Peter Jackson. I am particularly interested in talking to Anno about the character of Rei, a depressive, suicidal girl whose big eyes, girlish body, and blank expression have been the model for the central female characters in Japanese anime for the past decade.

"Rei is someone who is aware of the fact that even if she dies, there'll be another to replace her, so she doesn't value her life very highly," Anno explains, slouching ever-deeper into the couch. "Her presence, her existence—ostensible existence—is ephemeral. She's a very sad girl. She only has the barest minimum of what she needs to have. She's damaged in some way; she hurts herself. She doesn't need friends."

Anno understands the Japanese national attraction to characters like Rei as the product of a stunted imaginative landscape born of Japan's defeat in the Second World War. "Japan lost the war to the Americans," he explains, seeming interested in his own words for the first time during our interview. "Since that time, the education we received is not one that creates adults. Even for us, people in their 40s, and for the generation older than me, in their 50s and 60s, there's no reasonable model of what an adult should be like." The theory that Japan's defeat stripped the country of its independence and led to the creation of a nation of permanent children, weaklings forced to live under the protection of the American Big Daddy, is widely shared by artists and intellectuals in Japan. It is also a staple of popular cartoons, many of which feature a well-meaning government that turns out to be a facade concealing sinister and more powerful forces.

Anno pauses for a moment, and gives a dark-browed stare out the window. "I don't see any adults here in Japan," he says, with a shrug. "The fact that you see salarymen reading manga and pornography on the trains and being unafraid, unashamed or anything, is something you

wouldn't have seen 30 years ago, with people who grew up under a different system of government. They would have been far too embarrassed to open a book of cartoons or dirty pictures on a train. But that's what we have now in Japan. We are a country of children."

The children of Anno's generation meet in places like Loft Plus One, a basement party space in Shinjuku that is decorated like an East Village dive and smells of chlorine. The occasion in this case is a book party for Karin Amamiya, a beautiful, right-wing punk-rock singer turned cultural gadfly who has recently written a memoir about wrist cutting, a behavior that is currently trendy among young girls. The scene in the basement is a flower-power nightmare version of the daytime variety shows on Japanese television. A singer named Akira, decked out in a lizard-skin suit, tan buckskin jacket, and straw hat, strums a guitar and sings, "Yes, this life is difficult to live." Below the stage, a high-school girl is smoking

Shiomi's leadership, members of the group hijacked a plane to North Korea; later they taught the art of airplane hijacking to followers of the Palestinian terrorist George Habash. (In 1972, three members of the Red Army Faction, under the direction of Habash, killed 26 tourists and wounded dozens more at Israel's Lod Airport.) Having spent two decades in jail, Shiomi lives quietly in the outer suburbs of Tokyo. He rests his chin on his knuckles, as the counterculture speakers address their favorite themes of self-mutilation and suicide.

"Who the hell are you people?" Shiomi finally spits out, grabbing the microphone. "I know that life is hard. I was young once, too. It's easy to become a nihilist, and to care about nothing, and to think that everything is shit. The ultimate answer to that kind of thinking is jail. If you want to feel good about your life, you need to do something real! Understand the world! Study ideology!"

Amamiya, who traveled with Shiomi to North Korea a few years back, a journey that the right-wing Japanese

"I don't see any adults here in Japan ... You see salarymen reading manga and pornography on the trains and being unafraid, unashamed ... We are a country of children."

a joint alone. She is dressed in a dark, romantic costume of bustled black skirts and a lace bonnet, a popular style known as Gothic Lolita.

The host for this section of the evening is a writer whose pen name, Con Isshow, means "the endless now." A chain-smoker, dressed in a grubby green corduroy jacket and John Lennon-style glasses, he is a heavy drinker as well as the country's leading expert on the social behavior of Japanese youth, even though, or perhaps because, he never graduated from college. His personal hygiene is terrible. Sweating under the lights, he surveys the room.

"Wrist-cutters, raise your hands. Pill freaks, raise your hands. Those who were *hikikomori*"—acutely withdrawn—"and did not leave your rooms, raise your hands," Con Isshow intones, and the kids politely obey his instructions.

"Those who have tried *shudan jisatsu*"—group suicide—"raise your hands." In the far corner of the dark club, a lone guy in a tan sweater raises his hand, then ducks as if to avoid the spotlight.

Takaya Shiomi looks on from the stage in disapproval. Now in his 60s, with salt-and-pepper hair and the benevolent-seeming, steely gaze of a proletarian dictator, Shiomi is the former commander of the Red Army Faction, a terrorist group that styled itself as the Japanese arm of the worldwide Marxist revolution. In 1970, under

media called a deliberate act of provocation, has heard enough. "Yeah, yeah, yeah. We know all that," she says, dismissing the aging terrorist with a smirk.

As the party winds down, I exit the club with the guy in the tan sweater. He is almost 30, his name is Toji, and he lives in Shizuoka, Moon's hometown. We wander together through the scruffy underside of Shinjuku, a warren of strip clubs and bars and noodle counters, and wind up at a Chinese restaurant, favored by Taiwanese gangsters, that serves excellent dumplings. We take a table in the back room.

Listening to Toji's account of his fascination with suicide is like hearing any story of indoctrination into a cult, absent the evil mastermind who would persuade his followers to sign over their worldly possessions and drink poisoned Flavor Aid in a South American jungle. As Toji describes his growing obsession with online chat groups, a compulsion that brings to mind other behavioral addictions like smoking or gambling, there is something distant about his manner. He might as well be reciting the periodic table. In college he became interested in politics and economics but was unable to make friends or date women. When he graduated in 1997, he was still a virgin. He began a job marketing loans to small and midsized businesses. He did not enjoy sales, and all he could think about was quitting. In the evenings

he would come home to his parents' house and surf the Web, in the same bedroom he inhabited as a boy.

"I would look at sites like Yahoo Japan, the news on it and stuff," he explained. He was also a fan of Ayumi Hamasaki, a B-movie actress turned pop star known for her elaborately costumed sexuality and the banal lyrics she composes under a bewildering number of pseudonyms. He visited her fan site often and contributed to bulletin boards, an involvement that lasted for two years but did not produce any deep personal relationships. Feeling more depressed than ever, he began to visit suicide sites.

"Things weren't going well at work, and I thought that it was better to [commit suicide] than to keep on showing my stupid self to others," Toji explained. "I wanted the people around me to think that I was a 'good person.' So I would hold my own feelings deep inside me." He left his old job and found a new one, yet his interest in suicide only grew stronger. He preferred the idea of killing himself with others, even strangers, because he lacked the courage to die alone.

"The idea of sharing death together, and also the idea of dying of carbon monoxide, so that the death would be easy or less painful, interested me," he said. He would

visit the suicide sites for 20 minutes each time, hoping to limit his exposure to the depressing content but also curious to see if a group might seem right. He began to think about suicide in practical terms. The location had to be close, and he started to consider the best size for the group and whether they would have enough sleeping pills for a successful suicide, since even mild narcotics like sleeping pills are tightly controlled in Japan.

Two weeks after our first meeting, Toji sent me a message agreeing to my request for a second interview. His plans were more advanced, he said. I took the Tokaido line to Hara, where he met me at the station. He spoke intelligently but across a wide gulf, without the reassuring flatteries, tensions, and warmth of normal conversation.

As a child, he said, he collected train timetables, and woke up early to take pictures of the trains that ran through town. His favorite trains were the Blue Train in South Africa and the Falcon in Japan. Once, his family rode the Romance Car on the Odakyu express, to see relatives in Saitama. Several years after Toji took his first job, his parents told him they had always imagined he would take a job related to trains. His parents expected him to have a good job someday, and a family.

"This is so painful," he told me, showing emotion for the first and only time in our conversations. What was missing in his life, he decided, was passion. If he had passion, he would walk lightly. He once took medication for depression, but stopped when a new doctor replaced his old one at the local hospital. He found the new doctor arrogant and off-putting.

"He personally thinks that taking these pills is the same as taking insulin for a diabetic," my translator explained. "But because the people around him don't think so, he is forced to think the same way that they do, and stay off the pills."

Toji is a person for whom the affluent, increasingly insecure but still tightly controlled society of 21st-century Japan has no real use. Later that evening, we drive to his house, where he sleeps alone in his childhood bedroom; it's a room with bare walls, a single bed, a desk, a chest of drawers, a shelf of books, and a new Sony PlayStation 2 on the floor. His sister, whose bedroom is down the hall, has never had a boyfriend and will not allow her brother inside her room.

In the three weeks since I last saw him, Toji tells me, he has visited his favorite suicide sites two or three times a week, for about 10 minutes each time. When he is online, the dullness and depression lift, and he feels his life has a purpose that is clear. Soon, he says, he will find companions who are serious about dying, and who will allow him to join their group. ▀

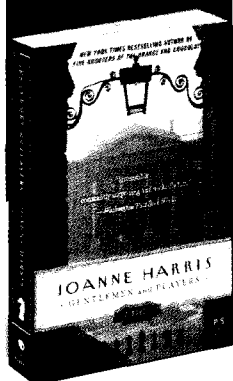
David Samuels, whose last piece for *The Atlantic* was a profile of Yasir Arafat, was a 2006 Japan Society Media Fellow.

1950

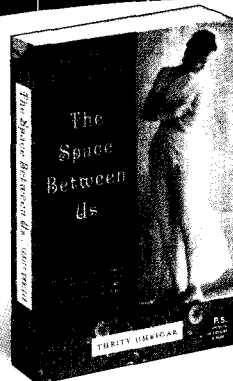
"Then let him ride in the bed of the truck
and wave the world home." That was the old man's answer.
So I made my small-fist climb up back
Of the cab, to see things in reverse and hear
The wind generalizing hedgerows and oaks,
And watch the avenues of fields that broke
Whenever a hedge gave out and sudden farm
Emerged, dogs barking alarm—
As we kept up that way,
Under the shade that tunneled and played
And deepened the road. But where were we going?
I never remember; only,
I owned cattle and barn, the loosely planked bridges
That rattled like drums, limbs flicking the sky.
And gravel busy under the musical tires;
Till filled with what ticked by, I wanted the entire
List of it, as that road retreated
And we were taken, the drive completed.

—WYATT PRUNTY

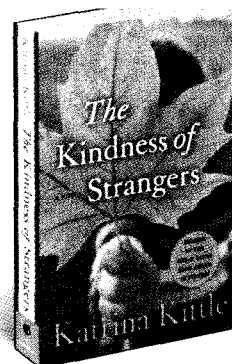
Wyatt Prunty's most recent collection is *Unarmed and Dangerous: New and Selected Poems* (2000). He is the Carleton Professor of English at the University of the South, where he also directs the Sewanee Writers' Conference.



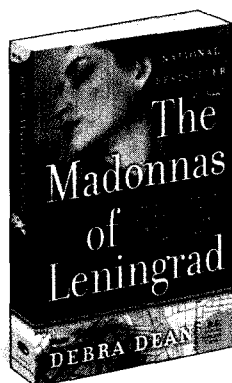
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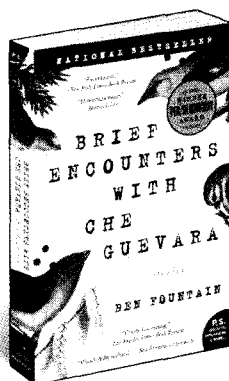
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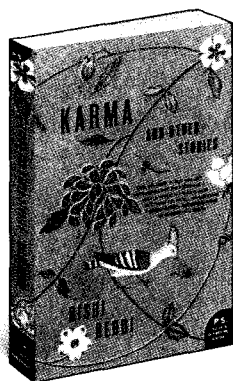


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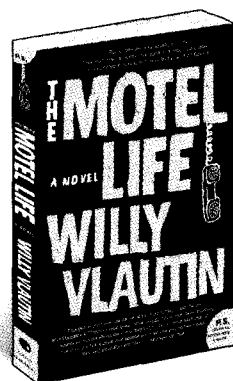


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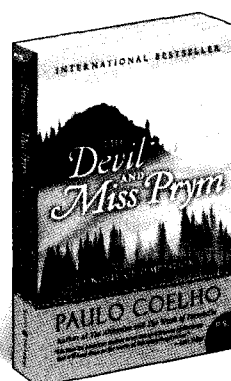
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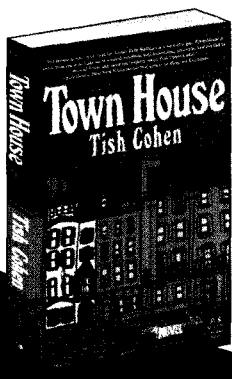
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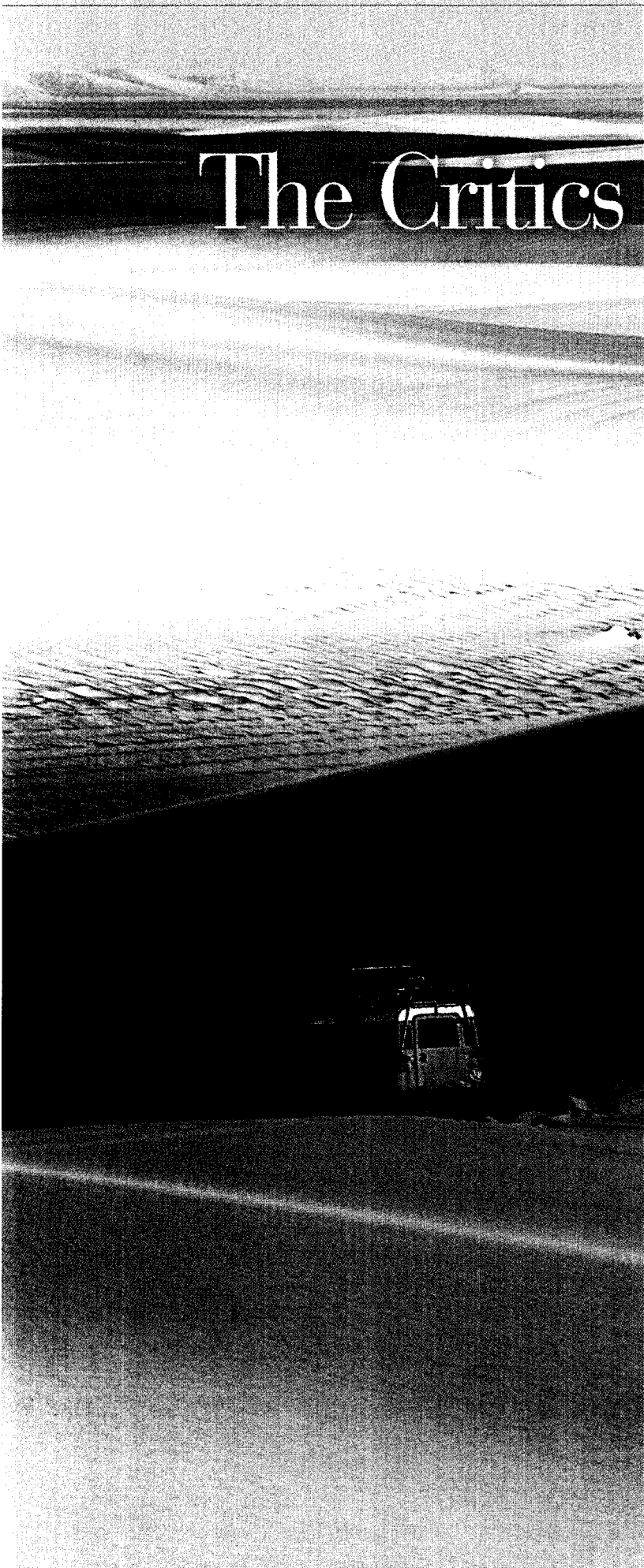
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TRAVELS PAGE **125**
ANGLE OF REPOSE

A lone traveler descends a dune in
Joshua Tree National Park in northern
California. Dave Clark explores the
desert and its wilderness, finding
peace in the solitude of the desert.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID CLARK



The Critics

THE ATLANTIC | MAY 2007

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PROPHET OF INNOVATION

JOSEPH SCHUMPETER AND
CREATIVE DESTRUCTION

THOMAS K. McCRAW

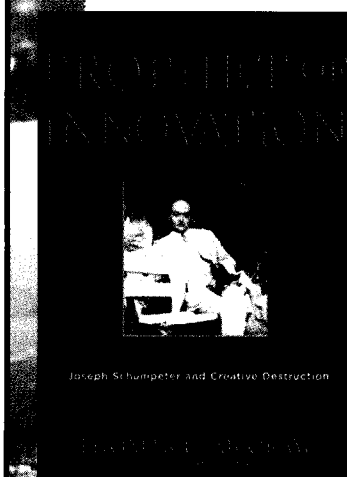
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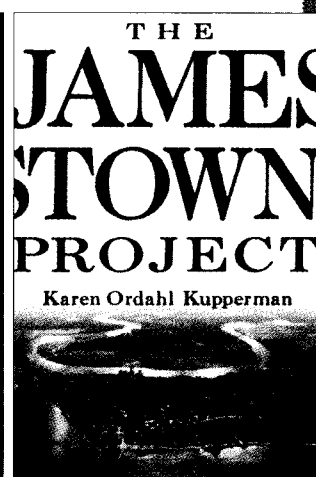
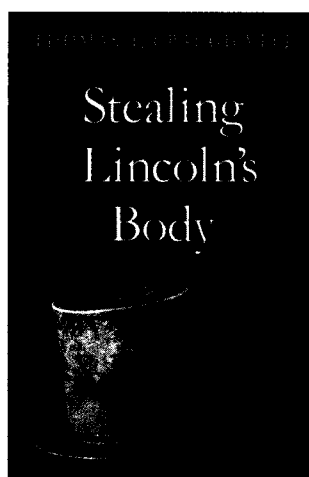
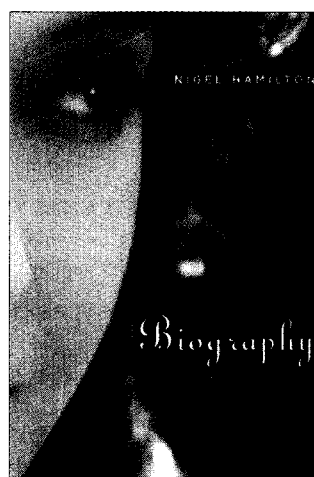
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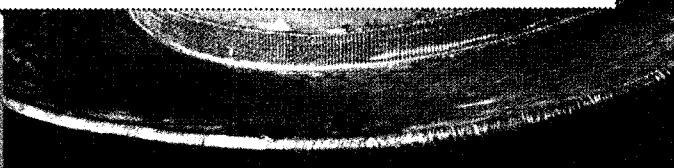
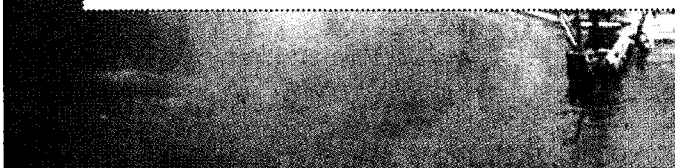
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RED ARMY defenders of Stalingrad

BOOKS

Editor's Choice: what to read this month

Stalin's Gift

BY BENJAMIN SCHWARZ

It's time for those (mostly male) readers interested in the Second World War to put down that umpteenth account of D-Day and turn to the new crop of books on the most colossal conflict the world has ever seen: the German-Soviet clash on the Eastern Front. Since the late 1980s, a historiographical revolution has been under way, as scholars fundamentally alter their understanding of this epic struggle, which killed 27 million Soviet soldiers and civilians and nearly 4 million Wehrmacht troops. They aren't merely revising an established narrative; they're discovering facets

of the conflict—even entire battles—that had been lost to history.

Churchill's chronicle of the Second World War, which has all but permanently fixed the contours of the conflict in the popular mind, deliberately played down the Soviet superpower's pivotal role in defeating the Axis. Since then, while scholarship advanced on, say, the Allies' air war against Germany or the North African campaigns, it was stalled or warped on the Eastern Front. The U.S.S.R. documented its war more thoroughly than any of the other contestants, but Soviet historians were forced

to evade the many aspects of the conflict that the state deemed embarrassing. For their part, Western scholars, denied access to Soviet archives, relied on German records and the self-serving memories of German generals. (The United States, in a Cold War effort to glean insight from its former enemy on how to combat its erstwhile ally, employed former Wehrmacht officers to examine and evaluate captured German documents. General Franz Halder, Hitler's chief of the Army General Staff from 1938 to 1942 and a man almost certainly complicit in crimes against humanity,

headed the project for the U.S. Army's Historical Division; John F. Kennedy awarded him the Meritorious Civilian Service Award for his efforts.)

The first to circumvent some of these constraints was the British historian John Erickson in his grand two-volume history, *The Road to Stalingrad* (1975) and *The Road to Berlin* (1983). Since the Cold War's end, many others have been tapping the extraordinarily rich vein of archival material.

The West's foremost active scholar of the "Great Patriotic War," David Glantz, a former U.S. Army colonel, has written more than 60 (!) highly detailed monographs on the Red Army and its military operations. Historians will be exploiting his meticulous and creative historical spadework for generations. (His most

than fleeing the enemy, a task it carried out in its customarily sanguine fashion. The Soviets executed more than 158,000 soldiers for desertion. "In the Red Army," noted Marshal Georgi Zhukov, "it takes a very brave man to be a coward.")

Just last year, three British authors published works of extraordinary literary merit. Antony Beevor, probably the most stylish writer on Russia's war, followed up his piercing *Stalingrad* (1998) and *The Fall of Berlin* (2002) with *A Writer at War*, a translation (with Luba Vinogradova) of the great Russian writer Vasily Grossman's previously unpublished front-line notebooks that manages to be at once precise and poetic. It is, I think, the best eyewitness account of the Eastern Front available

which were central, rather than incidental, features of its effort.

The most sophisticated recent studies of the Holocaust itself—Christopher Browning's masterpiece, *The Origins of the Final Solution*; and the just-published *The Years of Extermination*, the second and concluding volume of Saul Friedländer's summa, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*—inextricably fix the German war on the Eastern Front to the center of their story. For all the ferocious treatment of Jews in Poland, for all of Hitler's nebulous exhortations going back to the 1920s, it was the unprecedented scale and viciousness of Germany's attempted conquest of the Soviet Union that decisively radicalized the Nazis and crystallized their vision of liquidating European Jewry.

The deluge of new archival materials relating to the Eastern Front has been so steady that the two standard post-glasnost single-volume chronicles—Glantz's *When Titans Clashed* and Richard Overy's *Russia's War*—have already been overtaken by new sources. Evan Mawdsley, a British historian, has stepped into the breach with his crisply written *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War, 1941–1945*. This exceptionally precise and judicious work, now the authoritative general history, is especially useful because it largely supports some of the most provocative arguments in two new, not-so-judicious books: *Stalin's Wars*, a minute examination of Stalin's wartime leadership, by Geoffrey Roberts; and *Europe at War, 1939–1945*, by Norman Davies.

Davies, the author of the gigantic *Europe: A History* and the magisterial, sparkling, two-volume history of Poland, *God's Playground*, has written a shorter (544-page) work that is really two extended arguments with a lot of superfluous material. Although it seems to have been hastily and hotly written and contains too many embarrassing errors, it rearranges and juxtaposes facts and events in often unexpectedly illuminating ways. Most important, it's infused with irony and paradox, qualities essential to comprehending history but largely

The most murderous regime in Europe's history defeated Hitler, which tarnishes any notion of the "Good War."

recent study, *Red Storm Over the Balkans: The Failed Soviet Invasion of Romania, Spring 1944*, was published late last year.)

The British historian Mark Harrison has probed the Soviet wartime economic mobilization and planning efforts; these ruthless endeavors were brilliant, surprisingly flexible, and decisive in winning the war, but the consensus seems to be that the Soviet economy never recovered. Nikolai Litvin's just-released memoir, *800 Days on the Eastern Front*, offers a harrowing grunt's-eye view of the war. And a host of scholars are exploring such specialized subjects as the Soviet treatment of POWs; the wartime ethnic-cleansing campaigns directed against potentially collaborationist minority groups (2 million members of suspect minorities were uprooted from their homelands, and at least 231,000 of them died); and the role of the secret police in nearly every aspect of the war. (The NKVD's main military function was to keep Red Army soldiers facing rather

in English. Catherine Merridale issued her pioneering and panoramic portrait of the ordinary Russian soldier, *Ivan's War*. And the diplomat and historian Rodric Braithwaite published *Moscow 1941*, his sweeping, atmospheric (and in the United States, alas, largely ignored) account of life in the threatened city and of the Battle of Moscow—a contest that claimed the lives of some 926,000 Red Army soldiers.

A number of new books—all building on Omer Bartov's 1985 study, *The Eastern Front, 1941–1945: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare*—have dissected the Germans' "war of annihilation" against the Soviets. These include *The Attack on the Soviet Union*, a volume in the official German history of the war, and, most recently, Wolfram Wette's *The Wehrmacht*. These works have conclusively demonstrated that the Wehrmacht—and not, as postwar accounts by German generals would have it, merely the SS—freely and even eagerly joined in murder and genocide,

absent from the American view of the Second World War.

Davies finds insufferable a perspective on the conflict that emphasizes El Alamein, the Normandy landings, and the Bulge, and he condemns the American moral narcissism that holds that, to quote Stephen Ambrose, it was U.S. soldiers who would "win the war against Nazi Germany," and that Americans "stopped Hitler." Rather, he contends that "two core issues"—"proportionality" and "criminality"—"provide the key" to properly grasping the war in Europe.

As for the first, he recognizes that the Eastern Front was without question the pivotal theater of the war: For four years, more than 400 Red Army and German divisions clashed in an unrelenting series of military operations over a front extending more than 1,000 miles. (At its most intense, the war in the West was fought between 15 Allied and 15 Wehrmacht divisions.) Eighty-eight percent of the German military dead fell there; in July 1943, in the decisive battle of the war, the Soviets permanently broke the Wehrmacht's capacity for large-scale attack at Kursk, "the one name," Davies properly asserts, "which all historians of the Second World War should remember." He goes on to argue:

The Soviet war effort was so overwhelming that impartial historians of the future are unlikely to rate the British and American contribution to the European theatre as much more than a sound supporting role.

So (and this brings us to Davies's second point) the most odious criminal regime in Europe's history was defeated by an even more murderous regime, if numbers are the yardstick—which significantly tarnishes any notion of the "Good War."

In the face of persuasive evidence, Davies is compelled to extend this already provocative argument. Although an anti-Stalinist stance is de rigueur these days, he possesses a most pronounced Polophilia (the single positive bias evident in this acerbic book) and is thus especially passionate in his assessment of the crimes of the man who, in partnership with Hitler, tore Poland

asunder and later subjected it to nearly half a century of Soviet vassalage.

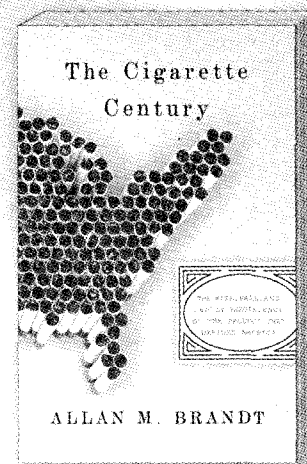
Davies could have employed the line the German generals promulgated after the war (thanks to their efforts, it became the conventional wisdom): that the Soviets owed their success only to Hitler's stupendous strategic mismanagement and ruinous interference in military operations, together with the sheer size of the Red Army. Or he could have followed the line put forward by the Soviets in the period of "de-Stalinization": that the Russian people, divorced from their leadership, secured victory by means of their patriotic energies. Instead, despite his abundant distaste for Stalin, he acknowledges the consensus of all the recent work I've discussed. Writing of Stalin, Davies declares: "The victory of 1945 in Europe was above all his."

This consensus, most baldly stated by Roberts, concedes that no leader in history was responsible for graver military failures—from his stunning miscalculation concerning the German attack to his insistence on premature and obscenely wasteful counteroffensives in 1941 and much of '42. But also evident is the iron resolve Stalin displayed in the Battle of Moscow, his perspicacity in calling Zhukov to command the effort, and the harsh will he helped summon in his subjects throughout the war. (Stalin's pistol-at-the-head command—"Not a step back"—issued on the eve of Stalingrad inspiringly conveyed to the Soviets the desperation of their situation, and the dry ruthlessness with which the state would tackle it.)

Most important, Stalin transformed himself and the military he commanded. Beginning in late 1942 with preparations for the Battle of Stalingrad, his newfound grasp of military strategy and operations is as inexplicable as it is plain. He orchestrated every level of the Soviet war effort—from the miraculous economic recovery to high diplomacy to operational planning—even as he encouraged argument from, and increasingly heeded the counsel proffered by, the remarkable group of military advisers with whom he surrounded

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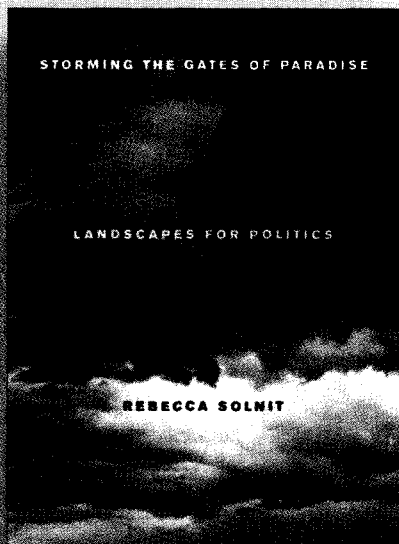
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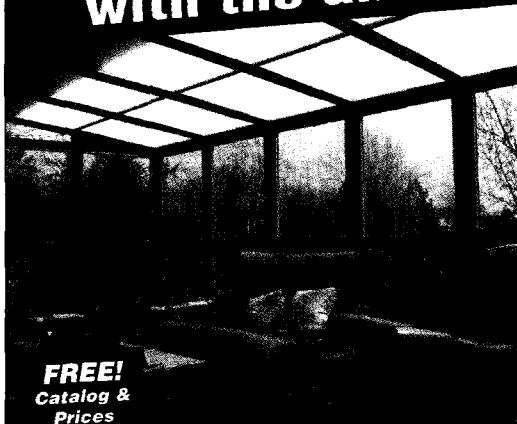


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himself: Zhukov, Chief of Staff Alexander Vasilevsky, and Chief of Operations Aleksei Antonov—all men of penetrating intelligence, exceptional abilities, and extraordinary character. With this triumvirate, along with such commanders as Konstantin Rokossovsky, Stalin put in the service of his state the finest generals of the Second World War.

The improved organization, equipment, supply, training, and command of the Red Army won the Battle of Stalingrad, thereby turning the tide in the war. By Kursk, the Red Army was precisely choreographing an operation of unprecedented scale. From then on, it was conducting ever more sophisticated and devastating "deep operations": extremely rapid, combined-arms advances that penetrated far into the Wehrmacht's rear areas—the most inventive and shattering feats of arms achieved by any military during the war. The Soviet army had undergone probably the most profound and rapid turnaround of any military organization in history.

To be sure, part of Stalin's accomplishment lay in his allowing his most talented subordinates to do their job, an attribute of all great warlords. From late 1942 on, he encouraged greater initiative and flexibility within the high command, and he presided over a military organization that fostered increased operational and tactical dynamism and innovation. But the new accounts—which even draw on transcripts of telephone and telegraphic conversations with his front-line generals—all go further than that, and put Stalin at the center of the Soviets' awesome military achievement. Davies's conclusion, that the victory was Stalin's, would seem inarguable. Roberts's unpalatable one, which goes one step further, will confound those who like their history neat:

To make so many mistakes and to rise from the depths of such defeat to go on to win the greatest military victory in history was a triumph beyond compare ... Stalin ... saved the world for democracy. ▀

Benjamin Schwarz is *The Atlantic's* literary editor and national editor.

BOOKS

Abortion and the bloodiness of being female

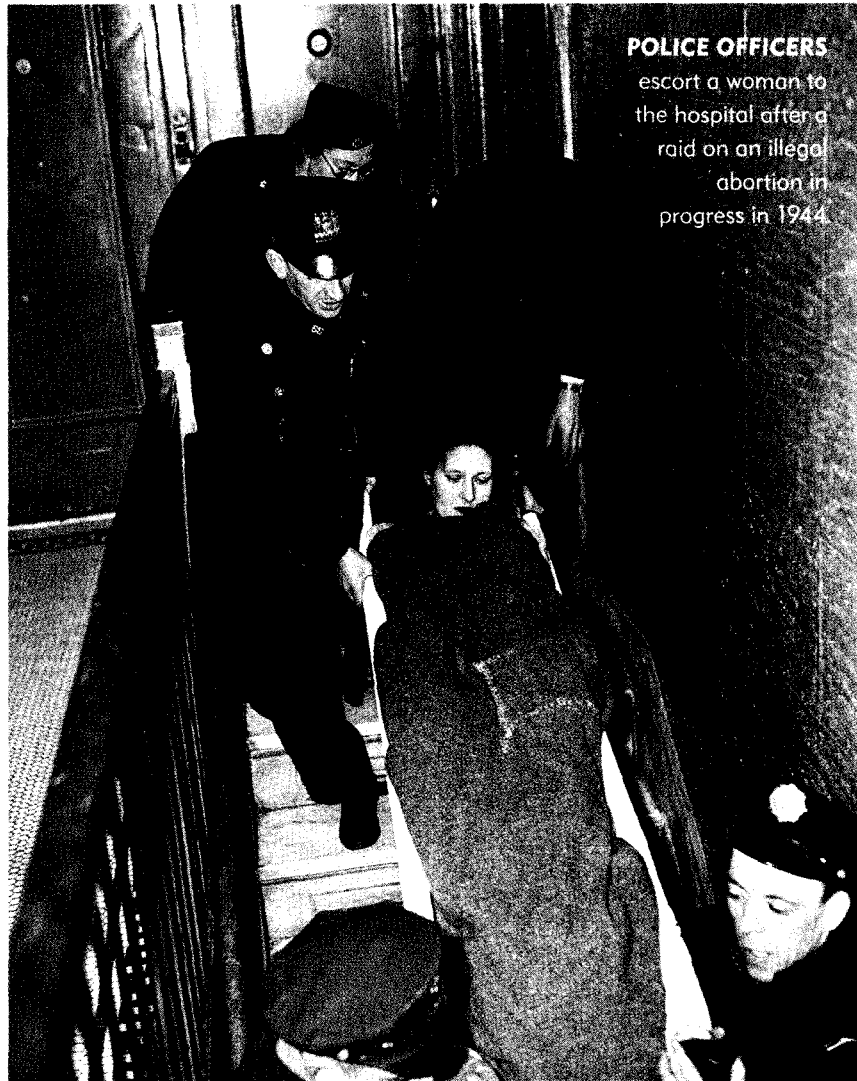
The Sanguine Sex

BY CAITLIN FLANAGAN

In the middle of a hot New York summer 60 years ago, my mother and her two roommates were invited to spend a weekend at Fire Island. The three girls, recent nursing-school graduates, worked together at Bellevue and were sharing the rent on their first apartment. When a fourth young nurse of their acquaintance overheard them talking about the trip, she asked if she and her young man, a resident at the hospital, could borrow the apartment while they were away. In those days, lovers had to seize on those kinds of opportunities to be alone together. The apartment key was given to the friend, no big deal, and my mother and her roommates left for the beach.

They returned late Sunday evening, in a commotion of kicked-off shoes and set-down carryalls and switched-on lights. One of them pulled the string on the kitchen bulb, and her cry brought the other two. At first they thought a crime had taken place. Strictly speaking, one had: The boyfriend, a kid with a year or two of medical training under his belt, had performed an abortion on his girlfriend. Literally, a kitchen-table abortion. There was blood on the table and the floor, and there were wadded-up bloody towels in the sink.

What happened next, I don't know. Probably two of the girls cleaned up (they were nurses, remember; they would not have been horrified by such a task once they had the nature of the thing sorted out), and probably the third went to the friend's apartment to check on her. All three were accomplices to a crime, and they would have been keenly aware of that. At Bellevue, my mother had twice attended dying young women who were victims of botched abortions, young women—"girls," she called them—



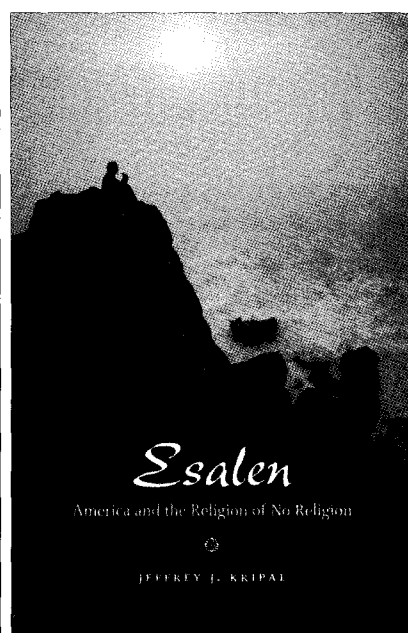
POLICE OFFICERS
escort a woman to
the hospital after a
raid on an illegal
abortion in
progress in 1944

who spent their last hours on earth being interviewed by policemen. Terrified, alone, dying, neither would reveal the name of the abortionist; "they were too frightened," my mother said. If I had to put money on which of the roommates bravely went to the girl's apartment, I'd put it on my mother.

About 15 years before my mother took her weekend trip to Fire Island,

she was a little girl living in Brooklyn in a bad situation. It was the Depression, her father was an unemployed laborer, and her mother—28 years old, a young woman from Coal City, Alabama, very far from home—had a toddler, a 3-year-old, and my mother, age 8. One day, according to the great and fearsome legend that shaped my mother's life and so much of my own emotional life, my

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grandmother did something very ordinary: She ate a can of tuna fish. The can of tuna fish was tainted with botulism poisoning. She began to have great pain in her abdomen, and—this is a very important part of the story—the doctor wouldn't come. Apparently he sent word that the woman in question had gas, and that she would be better in no time. She was dead in no time. "That's why I became a nurse," my mother said so many times in her life that it would have been a stock phrase, except for the anger and sorrow of the way it ended: "so that they couldn't do to anyone else what they did to my mother."

When I was a grown woman, I came across a wooden cigar box filled with old family papers, one of which listed gangrene as my grandmother's cause of death. This surprised me, and I began to wonder about the story I had always been told—beginning with its central element: the can of tuna fish. Mary Parker was a poor housewife with small children and an unemployed husband. By what mechanism of self-indulgence would she have prepared and eaten tuna fish, without giving anyone else in the household so much as a mouthful? How could she have been the only person to have ingested any of the poison?

Maybe my grandmother ate bad tuna fish—or, according to an alternate version of the story, bad peaches—and the food killed her. Or maybe she was 28 and living through one of the greatest disasters in American history, with no end in sight, trying to feed and look after three small children, and she found herself pregnant again, and she just couldn't cope. Maybe someone in that Brooklyn neighborhood knew someone who could help her out. Maybe the reason the doctor refused to see her is that he knew what she had done, and he wouldn't go near her. It turns out that badly canned food—with its risks of ptomaine and botulism poisoning—was

an ideal culprit on which to blame the sudden death of an otherwise healthy young woman: My family would not be the first to contain such a face-saving legend. In any event, my grandmother died, her husband was overwhelmed with misery, and the children were put on trains and scattered to relatives, and that was the end of that little family.

The history of abortion is a history of stories, and the ones that took place before *Roe v. Wade* are oftentimes so pitiable and heartbreaking that one of the most powerful tools of pro-choice advocates is simply telling them. *The Choices We Made* is a compendium of such stories, and while you could read it in an afternoon, you should not make the decision to do so lightly: It will trouble you for a long time afterward. In it, women whom we know for the large space they

occupy in the world—writers Grace Paley, Linda Ellerbee, and Ursula K. Le Guin, and actresses Polly Bergen and Rita Moreno among them—tell us about a time in their lives when they were reduced to begging for a simple medical procedure that, because of the circumstances in which it was performed, almost killed several of them and left at least one infertile. Abortionists in those days included a handful of merciful and scrupulous doctors willing to risk prison, and more than a few monsters who considered groping or sexually assaulting their patients a *droit du*

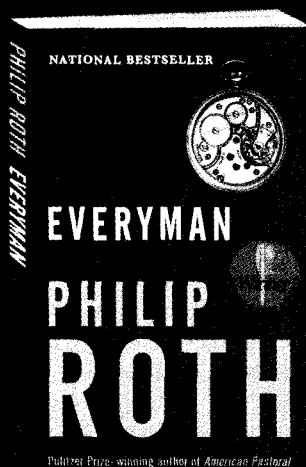
seigneur. Who would complain? And who didn't have it coming? In those days, it was not uncommon for a woman to receive a D & C without anesthetic shortly after being lectured about the wages of being a slut.

Most of the abortions recounted in the book occurred sometime between the late '30s and the early '60s, a time when so many American young women were ignorant of some of the most basic facts of reproduction, and when an unmarried woman's sexual life was, by definition, a

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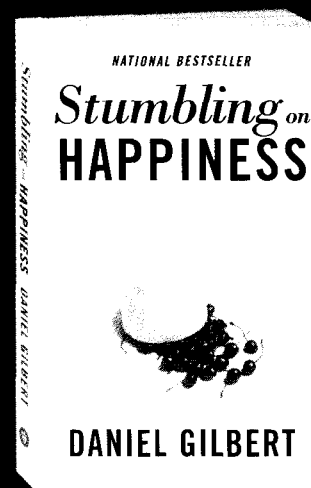
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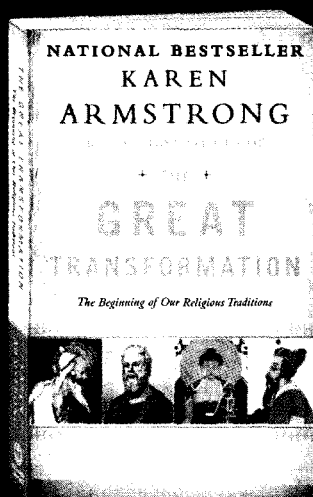
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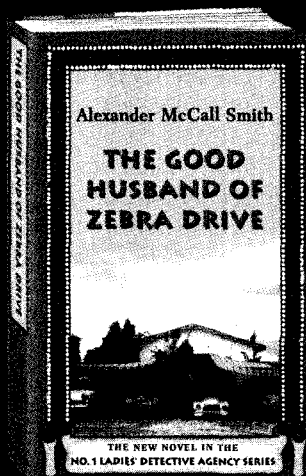
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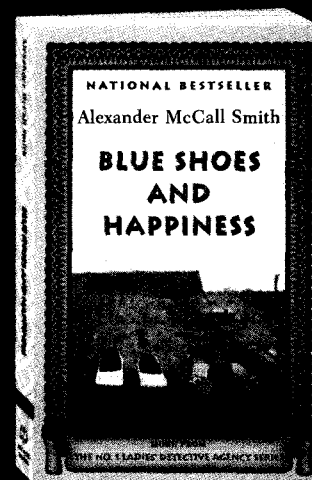
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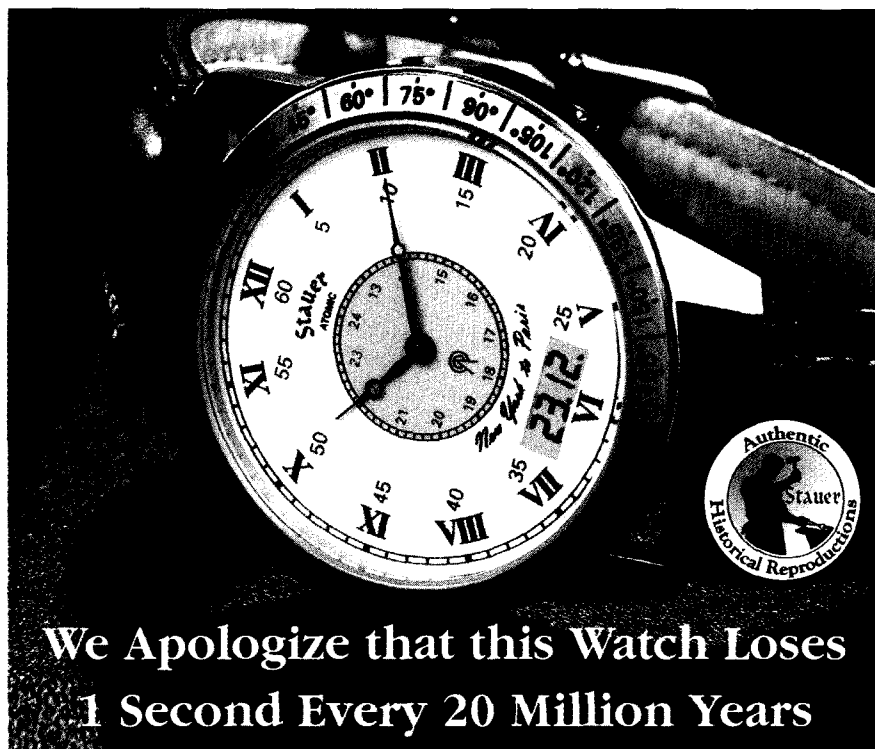
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shameful and secret thing. It was also a time in which pregnancy could destroy a young woman's prospects: She could be thrown out of college, fired from her job, removed permanently from the marriage market. Criminal abortions, of course, were dangerous business, and among the women who survived the procedure, many were rendered infertile.

The quality of the criminal abortion that a woman received depended largely on where she lived and how wealthy she was. Reports a woman who got pregnant while a student at Barnard in the 1930s: "The actual abortion was comfortable, clean, the absolute tops." On the other hand, here's a description of an abortion the actress Margot Kidder had as an 18-year-old in the mid-1960s. Her boyfriend, John, made the arrangements, "all done with great secrecy and a great sense of evil and sordidness"; the couple were told to check in to a certain hotel room where the abortionist, a woman, would meet them. After gaining their assurance that they would never go to a hospital if something went wrong, she began the procedure.

I was told to undress and lie in the bathtub, which I did. John was in the other room. There was no anesthetic, of course. She jammed something through my cervix. It was incredibly painful. I was screaming and crying; I had no idea what was happening to me. Then she used what looked like a douche to shoot some sort of solution up through my cervix.

The woman had filled Kidder's uterus with Lysol.

The *Girls Who Went Away* describes another price women once paid for having sex. It concerns the young girls—usually high-school students—who were part of a phenomenon virtually unheard-of today but once quite common in American cities and suburbs: the sending of underage pregnant girls to maternity homes, where they would bear their babies and surrender them for adoption. Neighbors and friends would be told that the girl had suddenly gone on an extended visit to an aunt or

grandmother, and in the fullness of time the girl would return, pale and shaken, to pick up where she had left off, never telling anyone where she had been. In a series of heartbreaking interviews, these women—now in mid- to late life—tell what actually happened to them in those homes, how little they understood of the pregnancies they were experiencing, and how greatly they pined for babies many of them were not allowed to see even once.

The brutality of the experience was heightened by the youth of the girls who underwent it, girls who still considered their mothers—not their young boy-friends—to be the chief source of comfort and protection in the world: “It was very hard for me to say good-bye to my mother,” writes one woman:

I had never been away from home except for an overnight visit to a friend's house. I was devastated to be away from her ... Every night before I went to bed, I would write my mother a love letter. I think she kept them for most of her life. And it kept me in touch with the one person who really loved me.

As a younger woman, my heart would have gone out only to the girl in the ward, but in middle age, I imagine just as vividly her mother, receiving those letters and imagining her child so lonely and frightened, and so far from home.

Adoption was presented as society's benign alternative to abortion, but the women interviewed for this book feel differently about that. Says another woman who surrendered an infant:

It's hard to convince others about the depth of it ... I'd have an abortion any day of the week before I would ever have another adoption—or lose a kid in the woods, which is basically what it is. You know your child is out there somewhere, you just don't know where.

If you are a supporter of legal abortion, reading books like these is chilling and galvanizing, just as their authors intend. But the stories in such books ought to have little role in shaping today's public policy. The women described in their

pages are travelers from an antique land, reporting about an America that is at once fairly recent and utterly unfamiliar. Bearing a child out of wedlock is so accepted today that some of the most respected professional-class women I know have done so intentionally.

Today, no young woman can be thrown out of college, or fired from her job, or cast out of “society” for becoming pregnant. Nor is adoption the horror that it was a generation ago: No birth mother needs to feel that her child is lost in the woods; she can decide to pursue an open adoption, she can change her mind about relinquishment, days—and in some states, months—after giving up the baby. Furthermore, even illegal abortion would look very different today

Mothers are charged with protecting the vulnerable among us. My very nature as a woman, then, pulls me in two directions.

than it did four decades ago. However bad the toll on women's health would be (and it would be very bad), it would be nothing like the carnage of the past. The age of ignorance is gone, and abortion is a simple procedure. In these days of home pregnancy tests and pharmaceutically induced abortion—and, above all, of sophisticated antibiotics—the mortality rate would be far lower.

But that doesn't mean that these stories can't help us understand the complexity of the question of abortion—only that we have been focusing on the wrong part of the narratives. The endings of these stories, with their dangerous abortions and forced adoptions, may have little bearing on the world of today. But their beginnings, with all the emotions and impulses and desires that have always combined to leave some women pregnant when they don't wish to be, are as timeless as anything in human history. They reveal something about the eternal and dangerous nature of being female, and because of this, they merit a great deal of our attention. The way these sto-

ries begin tells us as much as we ever need to know about the profound and complex decisions women make when they decide to have sex.

Recently, I saw a stand-up comedian joke about the first time he had sex. The only willing girl lived 25 miles from his house, and he didn't own a car. But that didn't stop him: He rode his bicycle to get to her. As the audience laughed at the thought of this desperate, horny journey, he drove his point home: “I mean, the real question is: ‘How far *wouldn't* a man ride a bicycle to have sex?’ There's no answer to that. He would just keep riding that bicycle.” There was a wave of happy laughter, a response not so much to the particular joke as to the idea it signified, which is the core of a reliable

genre of jokes: the gargantuan power of the male sex drive, and men's willingness to endure difficulty and unpleasantness to fulfill it.

When I hear jokes like that, I sometimes think of the kitchen sink full of bloody towels in my mother's apartment. Or, now, of the woman in *The Choices We Made* who returned to her apartment in Hollywood after an illegal abortion and stayed there, alone, for three days until her roommate came home:

Blood was on the bed; it was on the floor; it was on the carpet. We had run out of sheets and the mattress was ruined. I guess I did think I was dying ... But you know, I'm sure there was a part of me that thought I was supposed to die. I had done this terrible thing—I had had sex and I'd gotten pregnant. The abortion added to it, but that was not the terrible thing.

The real question is not how far a man would ride a bicycle to have sex. It's how much ruin and butchery a woman will risk to have sex—which turns out to be as much ruin and butchery as the

NEW FICTION

BY THOMAS MALLON

Susan Coll's new novel about the top-tier college-admissions game tries hard and amiably, but it needs to be wait-listed behind worthier spring fiction. *Acceptance* follows the luck of some affluent suburban-D.C. high-school seniors, including "AP Harry," a charmless version of Michael J. Fox's old *Family Ties* character, a kid so obsessed with getting into Harvard that he perceives the world through a compulsive synonymizing brought on by too much SAT prep: "He looked up and saw an extremely tall, thin (*lanky, gangly, awkward*) man with a shock of white hair ..."

Carried by the bright overwriting of higher-end chick lit—coffee gets "swilled" instead of drunk, and headaches tend toward migraines—this novel is just as caught up in the application process as AP Harry himself. A reader can almost see Coll's bulging files of clips and downloads about safety schools, weighted GPAs, National Merit scholars, student tour guides, alumni interviewers, the U.S. News list of top liberal-arts colleges, and those "résumé-enhancing" summer jobs that involve humbling service to Third World unfortunates. All of this homework chokes off narrative momentum: A second and more interesting plot, about the admissions office of Yates University in upstate New York, dies upon the ivy vine like an elective the overcommitted novelist has forgotten she's signed up for. The book ends up being too busy to question seriously the very phenomenon it's supposed to be satirizing—a predicament that proves ironic (*paradoxical, conundrum-like*).

Thomas Mallon is an *Atlantic* contributing editor. His newest book, *Fellow Travelers*, will be published this month.



world has in it. The heroic and audacious and mystifying part of the stories in these two books isn't how women got through abortions or adoptions; it's how they got the courage to have sex in the first place.

To begin with, of course, there is erotic desire. "Despite all of that terror—and I'm talking tooth-gnashing terror," recalls Rita Moreno,

I still now and then would give in, succumb, to those pleasurable moments. It's astounding. When you're that scared you usually stay away from the thing that scares you, but not with sexuality.

But women have always bound other emotions with their eroticism. To hear these women talk about sleeping with men for reasons that have nothing to do with sexual impulses is to understand something essential about women, and about why they have been so easily exploited by men for sex. "Nobody ever took into consideration *feelings*," writes Polly Bergen about the harsh lectures she was given about sex when she was a girl:

They never took into consideration wanting to be held or wanting to be loved or wanting to be cared for or wanting to not feel alone or frightened ... putting out seems like such a small price to pay for not being lonely.

A woman who was made pregnant—as a 17-year-old girl by a 31-year-old man—reports, "It wasn't like I liked sex or didn't like sex; I just wanted to be with him."

Women will always have emotional needs that they can fill through sex, and men will always use those needs to their advantage. But men will never bear the brunt of sexuality. The toll of sex—the anguish that it can produce, the consequences of it—falls on women alone. One of the most chilling episodes in *The Girls Who Went Away* occurs after a girl returns from her ordeal of giving birth and surrendering her baby. She sends the baby's father a note, to which he replies in bewilderment: "You sound so bitter, Lynne. You were never bitter."

Jerry Seinfeld used to have a routine about the television commercials

for laundry detergents that promise the product will remove bloodstains from clothing. "I think if you've got a T-shirt with bloodstains all over it," Seinfeld would say, "maybe laundry isn't your biggest problem." It's a funny line, and it's one that only a man could think of, because the real reason blood is such a vexing and eternal laundry problem doesn't have to do with gunshot wounds or serial shaving mishaps (in the commercials, a witless husband is forever nicking himself shaving, usually wearing his best white shirt, the male equivalent of showering in your bra and panties). Bloodstains occur and recur in households because women spend a lot of their lives bleeding. If a man or a child woke up in a small pool of blood, the alarm would be genuine and well-founded. But if a woman does so, it's business as usual. The bloodiness of menstrual blood is something that has been steadily de-emphasized in the past century, but blood it surely is. Once I walked into the students' restroom at an all-girls school late in the afternoon on a warm day, and the smell that assailed me was reminiscent of the smell of Buckley's, the butcher shop in Dublin where my mother bought Kerry beef running with blood.

Every month, a woman's womb slowly fills with blood in anticipation of an event that she wants to occur only a few times at most, and that up until 70 years ago had a good chance of killing her. This is nature's unkind way with women. The sort of man who knocks a woman up and then disappears is nowhere near as heartless as nature, which allows a fertilized egg to implant in a fallopian tube, or arranges a baby's body in the womb in such a way that it cannot by any natural means escape through the birth canal, or spreads the placenta across the cervix so that it will rupture and cause a hemorrhage almost certain to kill the mother if no medical staff is on hand to stop it. The fact that modern medicine has so radically reduced the incidence of death in childbirth testifies less to the wonder of science than to the crudeness of the dangers at hand.

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I've never had an abortion, and at this point in the game, I never will. Nor do I have daughters, so this is not an issue that will affect my own life in any immediate way. But I understand that the reality of women's and girls' lives is that they include as strong an impulse for sex as men's. And maybe because I am a woman, the practical has always had a stronger pull on my emotions than the theoretical. Those old debates about the nature of the human soul have never moved me; surely a soul is no more valuable to God if it exists in this world rather than the next. And a thousand arguments about the beginning of human life will never appeal to me as powerfully as a terrified pregnant girl desperate for a bit of compassion.

But my sympathy for the beliefs of people who oppose abortion is enormous, and it grows almost by the day. An ultrasound image taken surprisingly early in pregnancy can stop me in my tracks. In it is much more than I want to know about the tiny creature whose destruction we have legalized: a beating heart, a human face, functioning kidneys, two waving hands that seem not too far away from being able to grasp and shake a rattle. One of the newest types of prenatal imaging, the three-dimensional sonogram—which is so fully realized that happily pregnant women spend a hundred dollars to have their babies' first "photograph" taken—is frankly terrifying when examined in the context of the abortion debate. The demands pro-life advocates make of pregnant women are modest: All they want is a little bit of time. All they are asking, in a societal climate in which out-of-wedlock pregnancy is without stigma, is that pregnant women give the tiny bodies growing inside of them a few months, until the little creatures are large enough to be on their way, to loving homes.

These sonogram images lay claim to the most powerful emotion I have ever known: maternal instinct. Mothers are charged with protecting the vulnerable and the weak among us, and most of all, taking care of babies—the tiniest

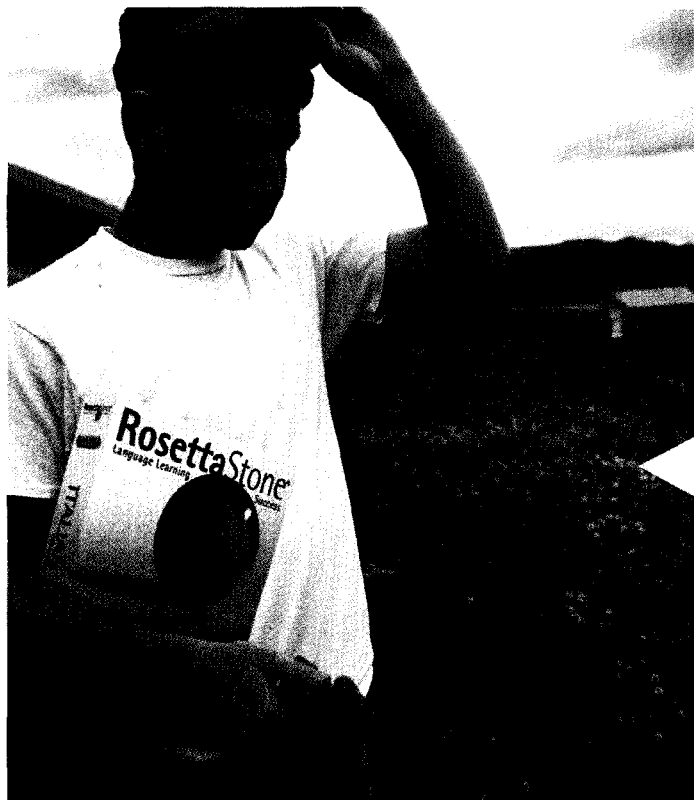
and neediest—first. My very nature as a woman, then, pulls me in two directions.

The Choices We Made ends with a couple of stories about the early days of legal abortion. One is told by Byllye Avery, who founded the first abortion clinic in Gainesville, Florida. The office space she and her three colleagues rented had a terrible tile floor, and the clinic's nurse said they needed to cover it. There was no money left for the shag rug they all wanted to buy, but the nurse said her mother-in-law was going to pay for it:

What we didn't know was that, actually, [the nurse] had ordered the rug and charged it to us. When we found out, we were so upset with her, but the carpet is what made the place. We had a beautiful blue shag rug that went through the whole clinic, even the exam rooms. That's what everybody who came there talked about—shag carpets were the rage. It was also that we had the gall to say, "We don't have to have these horrible tile floors just because this is a health-care facility." It helped women to know that abortions didn't have to be bloody and butchery. Certainly, you wouldn't put that kind of rug on the floor if it was going to be ruined.

It was a very womanly thing to do—to set your heart on a shag carpet, to trick someone into buying it for you, to rely on the fact that once it was installed, everyone would love it and forgive you. And it was womanly because of the way a simple bit of decoration could send a powerful and audacious message that only other women would be able to interpret. A river of blood runs through *The Choices We Made*, and it runs throughout the history of womankind. That river stops, more or less, with the installation of that shag carpet. The carpet, and the women who found the money to pay for it, along with all the women and men who made possible a context in which an abortion could be performed legally, safely, and even humanely—together they say: Enough. ▀

Caitlin Flanagan is the author of *To Hell With All That* (2006). She is at work on *Girl Land*, a book about the emotional life of pubescent girls.



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BOOKS

The turbulent life of Kingsley Amis

One Fraught Englishman

BY CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

In his 1991 *Memoirs*, Kingsley Amis stated roundly: "I have already written an account of myself in twenty or more volumes, most of them called novels." He partly qualified this by adding:

Novels they fully are, too, and those who know both them and me will also know that they are firmly unautobiographical, but at the same time every word of them inevitably says something about the kind of person I am.

If this seems like having it both ways—while blocking the boring interviewer who inquires how much a certain character is drawn from life—it is also the ideal opportunity for a serious literary biographer. In this astonishingly fine and serious book, which by no means skips the elements of scandal and salacity, Zachary Leader has struck a near-ideal balance between the life and the work, and has traced the filiations between the two without any strain or pretension.

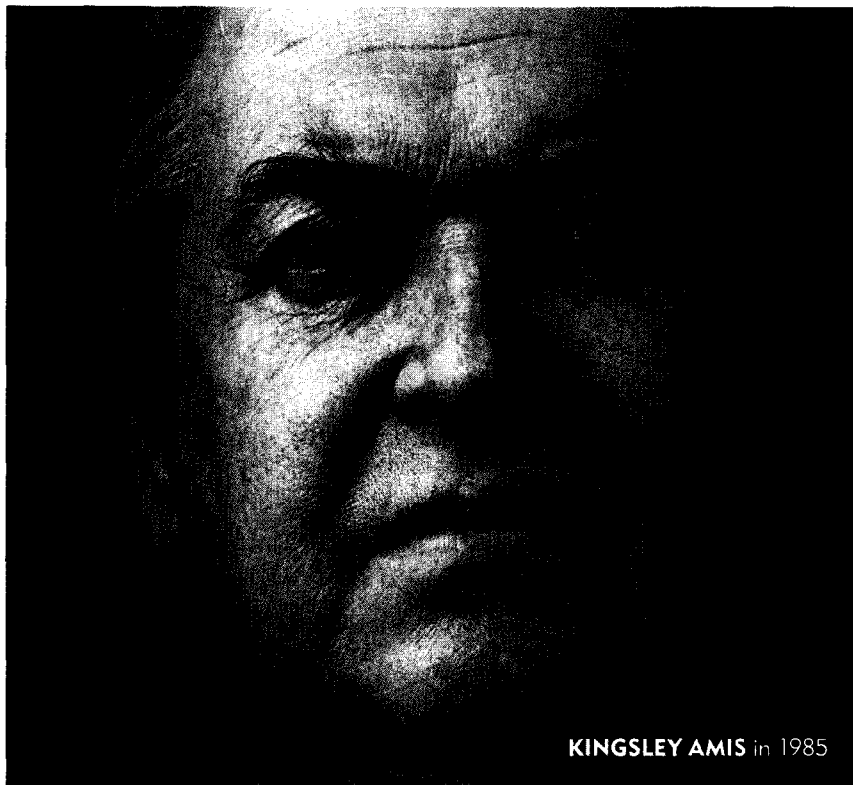
There is a biography within the biography here, and it brings into high relief the figure of Hilary Bardwell, the bewitchingly lovely woman who was Amis's first wife, the mother of two of his children (as well as the mother of another whom he never disowned), the source of his infinite regret and self-reproach, and, at the end, his mother-surrogate. Among her numberless charms is a complete absence of guile, combined with an absolutely penetrating acuity that often reveals more than she quite realizes. Here she is, on the glamorous and sexy and brilliant young man she met at Oxford (where the mind reels at the thought of his induction into the Communist Party by Iris Murdoch). He was invariably interesting and amusing but he would make

endless complaints about what seemed to me harmless things like apparently ordinary, nice people coming through the swing-door at Elliston's restaurant. He'd start muttering, "Look at those fools, look at that idiot of a man", and so on. If doors got stuck, or he was held up by some elderly person getting off a bus, or the wind blew his hair all over the place, he would snarl and grimace in the most irritating fashion.

I barked with laughter when I read this, because I remember Amis once converting a loud belch into a brilliant sort of trumpeting sound, and then explaining to me that it was wrong to waste a perfectly good noise. The same was true (as all readers of *Lucky Jim*

will remember) of any scowl or frown that might come his way: These were opportunities of which the absolute maximum should be made. As for the chance encounter with a bloody fool or a raging bore, well, Amis knew meat and drink when he saw it.

A man who is terrified of boredom, was overindulged by parents who got on his nerves, is easily irritated, and can moreover transmute a lowly fart into a piercing trombone imitation is possessed of the lineaments of literary and comic genius, but he may conceivably be hard to live with. The feelings of the tolerant and decent Hilary were extremely injured when her husband took her shambling old pedant of a father and made him into *Lucky Jim's*



KINGSLEY AMIS in 1985

DAVID LEVENSON/CETTY IMAGES

insufferable Ned Welch, whose smallest gesture drives Jim Dixon into a frenzy of tedium-induced rage. But, recovering as she later did from many worse abuses, she never ceased to appreciate that you couldn't really have the one Kingsley without the other.

Any dolt can see the connection between the mother-smothered Amis and the later unstoppable tit-man who was also a slave to Bacchic overindulgence. (Patrick in *Difficulties With Girls* has a reverie about the ideal female: "wise, compassionate, silent and with enormous breasts": If this young lady had lived in a single bedroom upstairs from a pub, Amis might have questioned his own stout disbelief in God.) But the need for anarchic release was always qualified by an impressive discipline—evidenced in a no-less-impressive output that barely flagged until the end—and by a prolonged wrestle with the demons. Both elements are present in a letter to Philip Larkin just after the sudden celebrity and fortune that attended *Lucky Jim*: "I feel in a sense that 'they can't stop me now', except when I take up my new novel and feel how easy it will be for me to stop myself."

This instinct for hubris and nemesis perhaps partly underlay the numerous dreads and phobias that black-dogged Amis throughout his life. In an especially interesting section on the time Amis spent teaching at Princeton (acquiring a Warren Beatty-like reputation among faculty wives), Leader makes one realize how very close Amis came to making the move permanent, and to becoming an American. He didn't write even once to Larkin, his most insular friend and most faithful correspondent. But then one of the reasons for his own later relapse into insularity was his unvanquishable fear of getting on an airplane. As to his other terrors, and the means of combating them, here is his other great epistolary partner, Robert Conquest, writing to Larkin in 1960:

Your points on K are interesting. Note also his new line that screwing is a way of forgetting about dying. Negative thinking there, eh? And allowing ten fucks a week at twenty minutes each, it leaves an awful lot of time for seeing the skull beneath the skin, lifeless creatures underground, etc.

Actually, that "new line" is one of the oldest in the human book, but almost a decade later, Amis's novel *The Green Man* would demonstrate with unsettling insight the *failure* of sex to ward off intimations of mortality and post-mortality. Indeed, one might say that the diminishing returns of the avid sexual life are a leitmotif in the entire oeuvre.

The larger and longer arc—of the declension from Angry Young Man to clubman and gouty curmudgeon—is the one that many critics confidently expected Leader to follow. In this rather dull expectation, they will find them-

selves somewhat disappointed. Amis never considered himself part of the John Osborne *Look Back in Anger* phenomenon, any more than he believed himself to be a member (along with Conquest,

Larkin, and John Wain) of what one critic rather unimaginatively termed "The Movement." He was very much his own man. In order to annoy people, he may sometimes have quoted Conquest's "First Law," which states, "Generally speaking, everybody is reactionary on subjects he knows about." But on the great subject that he himself did know about—English literature and language—he was far from being an axiomatic conservative. Though he might have served as the beau ideal of Henry James's injunction to be one of those on whom nothing was lost (those noises!), he never missed a chance to ridicule James himself, and other establishment figures as well. He must have been delighted when the austere academic gatekeeper F. R. Leavis dismissed him as "a pornographer."

Amis had a bracing attitude toward popular culture, writing about science fiction, for example, "As a recently retired university teacher I can't help

THE LIFE OF KINGSLEY AMIS

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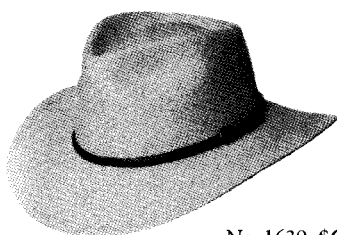
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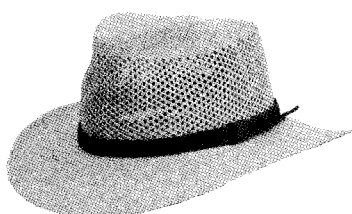
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being slightly drawn to any form of writing that reaches no part of its audience through compulsion." The great drawback of sci-fi is the dearth of sex from which it compels itself to suffer (I realized when reading Leader's book that this is why I have never bothered with the genre), but Amis, not content with writing scholarly treatments of the subject, produced a historical/futurological novel, *The Alteration*, which Philip K. Dick himself rightly praised as possibly the best "alternate world" fiction of the lot. I might add that the subject of sex in this work is introduced in the most radical and subversive way, though without the smallest hint of the pornographic.

Contra Leavis, it goes without saying that Amis never described any sexual encounter without the greatest subtlety, tenderness, and (this isn't easy; try it if you don't believe me) wit. It should also go without saying that none of his fictions betrays any vulgarity or prejudice, against any supposed "minority." If one of his characters expressed such views—the eponymous hero of *Stanley and the Women* being the most notorious case in point—Amis was always honest enough to say that he was capable of drawing on feelings of his own that he found less than admirable. The absolutely necessary novel here is *Girl, 20*, in which the character of whom Amis most disapproves politically is also made irresistibly charming, and in which—this is a really brilliant knight's move—the activity on which Amis himself had expended the most time (adultery) is shown by the actions of this very charmer as destructive to all parties.

But the closing years were gruesome, in a way that almost certainly derived from the antithesis between his two chief desires (women and drink: "You can't do both," as Amis phrased it in another connection), and Leader doesn't flinch from saying so. It wasn't just dreadful to see the old boy drifting into his "Shoot Mandela" twilight of curmudgeonhood. It was dreadful to see him abandon all effort to be witty—the very man who in plotting *Ending Up* had masterfully noted 45 different ways of "being annoying."

The usual way of defining a reactionary pose that becomes a reactionary drone is to say that the face has grown to fit the mask. Amis himself prefigured this idea in a poem titled "Coming of Age," where the central figure "played his part so well / that he started living it ... / His trick of camouflage no longer a trick." Noticing an Amis booze bill that was heroic by any standards, I thought of the tally for the "intolerable deal of sack" in *Henry IV* and scribbled "Falstaff" in the margin. As if to help my thought along, there was Amis, not many pages later, comparing himself to the old knight. Profane and surfeit-swelled he certainly was, the majestic trumpeting becoming louder but less amusing, as of a dying pachyderm, while he became more of a fool and less of a jester.

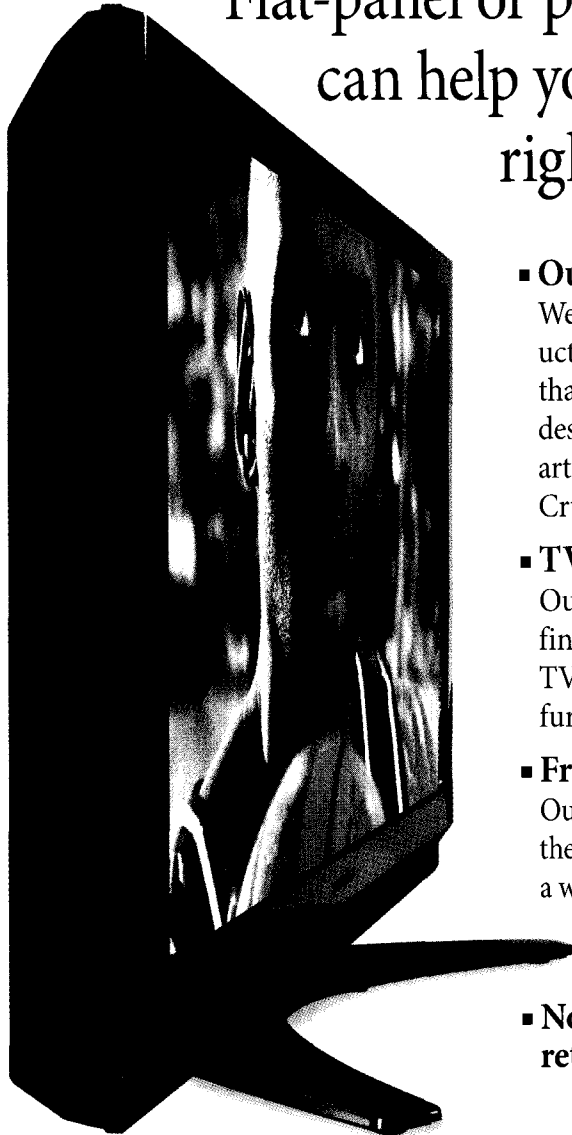
However, no "Imperialist Racist Fascist" sexist could have hoped to evoke the genuine admiration and mourning of two of Britain's strongest literary feminist voices, Janet Montefiore and Rosie Boycott. Nor—though this is perhaps slightly more arguable—could anyone who was entirely selfish have been forgiven by so many family members and ex-lovers who could have complained of being wronged. Just as the image of the expiring elephant suggests a massive pathos, so it became apparent that Amis, very far from being a misanthrope, was lonely and frightened and more in need of other people than he liked or dared to admit.

It is sad to find that his muse of alcohol—the gift of Bacchus—was what got him in the end, but there are several novels, beginning with *One Fat Englishman*, in which he quite clear-sightedly sees this coming, and one might in valediction remember what Winston Churchill said about brandy, which was that in life's eternal wager, he had gotten more out of it than it had taken out of him. Indeed, you couldn't have one Kingsley without the other, and Zachary Leader's wonderful book shows us both of them, as it illustrates the rival processes of composition and decomposition. ▀

Christopher Hitchens is an *Atlantic* contributing editor and a *Vanity Fair* columnist.

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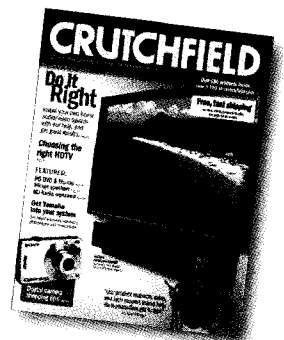
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READING LIST

TRAVELS WITH THEIR AUNTS

Freeloading aesthetes and the women who kept them

BY SALLY SINGER

"It is a notable fact that wealthy ladies past middle age very often find their firmest friends among homosexuals," writes James Lord in his 1994 memoir, **Six Exceptional Women**. He continues:

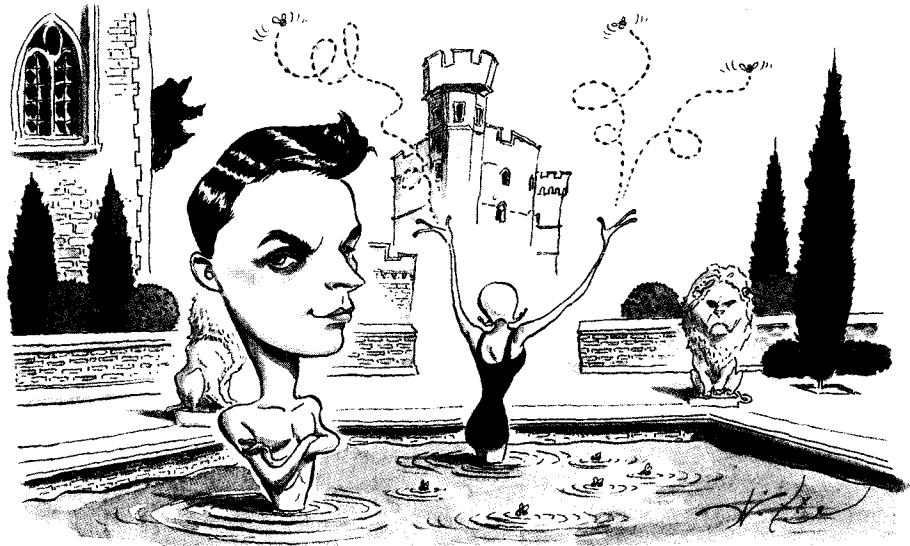
Heterosexual men have little time to spare—or should one say waste?—on older women, no matter how rich, unless there is a convincing likelihood of appropriating their money, whereas homosexuals enjoy the refinements of costly sociability and elegance for their own sake.

Lord—biographer of Alberto Giacometti and Dora Maar and *bon ami de tout Paris* circa 1960—is charmingly up-front about the fabulous holidays on the Riviera or the Greek islands that he wangled out of well-propertied, colorful old biddies like the freakily fabulous narcissist Marie-Laure de Noailles (40-bedroom proto-McMansion in Hyères) and the formidable Greek Errieta Perdikidi (Skyros villa: "plain and unassuming but possessed an air, an atmosphere, a character that asserted deliberation and taste"). The cross-generational friendships he describes are mutually parasitic: The loaded fag hags need an audience for their incredible stories, the young writer needs material, and everyone nurses a heart broken by a man who just isn't that into them.

Tragedy shadows the pergolas. Of his boyfriend Christian Davillerd, with whom Lord first visits Skyros in 1959, Lord writes:

Aged then about thirty, he gave no indication whatever that he would later succumb to uncontrollable alcoholism, recover eventually, endeavor without success to become a monk, devote himself for a time to the care of handicapped children, then one night walk into the sea never to return.

Meanwhile, recalls Gore Vidal of the year 1948, in his rambling, name-hurling, but perversely engaging autobiography



Palimpsest, "a pack of queens were on the move that summer in Europe." Vidal was not one of the pack, mind you, being far too iconoclastic and snooty to randomly shack up with Truman's and Tennessee's patronesses. But he did his fair share of five-star freeloading: Who but Vidal could offer anecdotes about "the grubby pool at the Royal Lodge at Windsor, where Princess Margaret and I, in mid-pool, saved a number of bees from drowning, she exhorting them in a powerful Hanoverian voice to 'go forth and make honey!'"?

Vidal is so gloriously high-and-mighty that he even condescends to time itself:

Now, at century's end, I find it hard to believe that I once lived in a time when writers were world figures because of what they wrote, and that their ideas were known even to the vast perennial majority that never reads.

In the '50s, the mother-hating, too-rich, and too-thin-skinned poet James Merrill was also flitting across Europe. "Comfort and privilege, ours from birth, had left us with a lightness of tone that worked like a charm in the right company," Merrill writes in his memoir, **A Different Person**. The Poros hostess with the mostest, Mina Diamantopoulos, was a woman "in her early sixties, with dramatic Byzantine eyes, silvering hair in a bun, and a manner of perfected naturalness." Mrs. Diamantopoulos also happened to be in love with Merrill's former boyfriend Kimon Friar, a sad-eyed classicist with a scholarly subspeciality in Djuna

Barnes, and would eventually marry him. "If Kimon of all people was taking a wife," wails Merrill, "what hopes had I of resisting the undertow of generations?"

Some sponging can be a real drag. Invited in 1965 onto Cécile de Rothschild's yacht, the *Siëta* (yet another Aegean tour), Cecil Beaton runs into his foul-tempered ex, Greta Garbo: "At dinner she remarks, 'How beautiful this fruit looks, but it's all rotten, not ripe, hard, uneatable.'"

Nor is leading a life of insouciant jet-setting as easy as it looks, **Beaton in the Sixties** reveals:

Yesterday there had been a commotion when [Garbo] said, "I can't be that wrong. It must be Instant Coffee!" "No, it's Maxwell House." "It can't be. Like the people of Missouri I want to see. Show me the tin." An enormous new tin of Maxwell coffee was brought. No apology, just, "Well, it must be rather stale and has lost its strength."

Beaton eventually fled the yacht and hightailed it over to the Brandolini palazzo in Venice, where

Philip Van Rensselaer provided comic relief with his frankness about being a gigolo to Barbara Hutton ... "I couldn't go on. It was too tiring. I had to take sleeping pills, and have champagne and eggs ... so I think I'll take a flat in Tangiers."

Life's a bitch, and then it isn't. **A**

Sally Singer is the fashion news and features director at *Vogue*.

BOOKS

A guide to additional releases

COVER to COVER

HISTORY

Buda's Wagon

by Mike Davis (Verso)

Arguing that "no other weapon in the history of warfare has proven to be such a promiscuous equalizer of combat between elephants and fleas," Davis, a prolific leftist historian, traces the evolution of the car bomb from the explosives-laden horse wagon that the anarchist Mario Buda detonated on Wall Street in 1920 to the "improvised explosive devices" of today's Iraq. Despite characteristically overheated prose, Davis creates a fascinating genealogy that raises chilling questions about the future of terrorism.

West from Appomattox

by Heather Cox Richardson (Yale)

This well-written and perceptive history considers Reconstruction as a national—rather than strictly Southern—phenomenon that united the North, South, and West, and created the creed of middle-class individualism that would define the 20th century. Richardson skillfully details some glaring contradictions—that the Wild West was settled only with significant government intervention, for example, and that the era's new egalitarianism excluded large groups of people deemed insufficiently white, male, or "hardworking"—and shows the sway this doctrine still holds today.

BIOGRAPHY and MEMOIR

Ralph Ellison

by Arnold Rampersad (Knopf)

You don't often find a biography as beautifully written as this one. Ellison, who wrote the Great American Novel but then allowed its achievement to prevent him from ever completing another, will always be something of



an enigma. But if anyone can finally provide more answers than questions about this most complex of men, it is Rampersad in this vivid, graceful, and exceptionally intelligent work.

Edith Wharton

by Hermione Lee (Knopf)

Lee, the author of a magisterial biography of Virginia Woolf, uses her prodigious knowledge and uncommon perspicacity to bolster her claims for Wharton as a pioneering modern woman as well as a great writer, but not everyone will warm to the formidable figure presented in her book. It's all very well to acclaim Wharton's boldness and toughness, but when you read her vicious assessment of Carl Van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance, along with some anti-Semitic and other very nasty racist remarks, you realize that modernism allowed the embrace of some dark gods.

Spymistress

by William Stevenson (Arcade)

Vera Atkins was a Romanian Jew who became more British in her manner than most natives, but whose intimate knowledge of Continental Europe enabled her to run a very successful undercover operation in Nazi-occupied territory. Her story, with its many successes bought at a terrible price by some of the female operatives, is far more intricate and exciting than the world of James Bond.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh: First Lady of the Air

by Kathleen C. Winters
(Palgrave Macmillan)

While giving some attention to Anne Morrow Lindbergh's poetry and best-selling prose, as well as the trauma of her son's kidnapping and murder, this brief biography focuses on her crucial role as Charles Lindbergh's co-pilot and navigator. Anne accompanied her

husband in tiny two-passenger aircraft as they helped lay the groundwork for Pan Am's transatlantic, transpacific, and intercontinental passenger routes. It would seem that after Amelia Earhart and her British counterpart, Amy Johnson, Anne Morrow Lindbergh was the most consequential woman pilot of her time—and unlike them, she didn't die in the course of her exploits.

Notebooks

by Tennessee Williams, edited by
Margaret Bradham Thornton (Yale)

This tome provides an acute glimpse into the mind, art, and life of the preeminent mid-century American playwright. Williams's world as recounted here is as messy and as haunted and as sad as might be expected, but the writer springs from these pages a humane, scrupulous, honest, and very likable man.

Europe's Physician

by Hugh Trevor-Roper (Yale)

Best known for his sterling *The Last Days of Hitler*, Trevor-Roper was also a noted scholar of the Reformation and its era. For three decades before his death, in 2003, he worked on this absorbing study of Theodore de Mayerne, a once-famous but now-forgotten 17th-century royal physician and occasional diplomat/spy. The biographer, a lifelong student of diplomacy and the son and brother of doctors, brings his intriguing subject to life.

The Mistress's Daughter

by A. M. Homes (Viking)

Those who have read A. M. Homes's fiction would expect a memoir from her to be diamond-hard, with flashes of humor as well as brightness. They will not be disappointed by this book, in which she tells of her bruising adult encounters with the unappetizing pair who had given her up for adoption in her infancy 30 years earlier. In meeting with the



adult Homes, the biological parents got both more and less than they were seeking, and Homes got only grief from them, but her readers get a story to treasure.

Room for Doubt

by Wendy Lesser (*Pantheon*)

The three intensely personal essays that make up this trenchant little volume display Lesser's talent for brilliant, merciless self-criticism. She emerges as quirkily attractive and consistently interesting.

SOCIETY and CULTURE



Full Disclosure

by Archon Fung, Mary Graham, and David Weil (*Cambridge*)

What you don't know will hurt you, especially when it comes to information on, say, how many patients die in your local hospital or which toxins are contaminating your drinking water. The authors, three Boston-based researchers, offer examples from the United States and other countries of individuals and political groups encouraging policies that coax and/or force companies and governments to release information they would rather hide.

Impotence: A Cultural History

by Angus McLaren (*Chicago*)

Viagra promises to relegate to history the affliction explored in this learned, always diverting study. Alas, its author avers that in fact the little blue pills are simply the latest in a long line of "charms, aphrodisiacs, and herbal remedies consumed in ages past for similar purposes." The best thing about this book is that it's a true history, beginning with manhood in ancient Greece and Rome and going on through Freud and Marie Stopes before concluding in our own chemically dependent age.

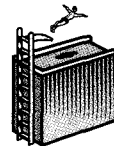
The Cigarette Century

by Allan M. Brandt (*Basic*)

This examination of the cigarette's place in American life, written by a Harvard medical historian, manages to be both an engrossing cultural history and a passionate, exhaustively researched indictment of a public-health catastrophe that happened largely in plain sight. From a 1929 publicity stunt imploring women to "Light another torch of freedom!

Fight another sex taboo!" to the rise of that most distinctive advertising icon, the smoking spokesdoctor, Brandt outlines how the industry ingeniously built and preserved its customer base even as evidence of smoking's harmful effects mounted beyond question. Having served as a plaintiff's expert witness in recent tobacco-liability litigation, Brandt argues that the industry has survived such trials and is now focused on expanding its reach throughout the developing world. With access to new markets, he writes, tobacco products stand to claim a billion lives worldwide in the 21st century, 10 times the death toll they caused in the 20th.

FICTION



In the Driver's Seat

by Helen Simpson (*Knopf*)

English writer Helen Simpson is mordantly funny and unafraid of life's big issues, such as love, aging, and war. While the stories in this collection are as vigorously written as her previous works, they lack the subtlety and complexity of which Simpson is capable. The touching "Early One Morning" and the multi-themed "Constitutional" are sparkling exceptions, though, and well worth the price of admission.

This Human Season

by Louise Dean (*Harcourt*)

Dean, also English, sets her remarkable second novel in 1979, in the midst of Northern Ireland's Troubles, and tells her story alternately from the point of view of a political prisoner's mother and of one of his guards. Her research is both impressive and unobtrusive, and she develops her characters with unwavering clarity and sympathy. Here, as in her first novel, Dean evinces a remarkable maturity of outlook and supreme control of her form.

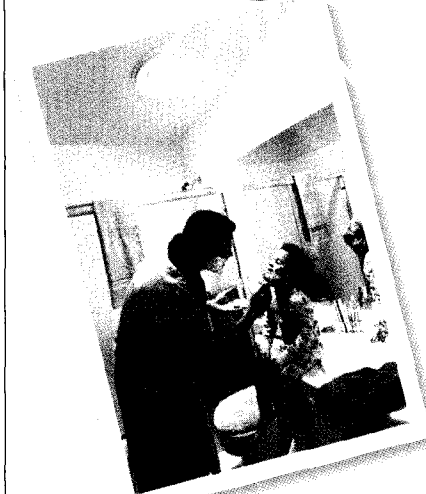
Body Surfing

by Anita Shreve (*Little, Brown*)

Shreve, with her serene style and impeccable pacing, returns to familiar territory: the house on the New Hampshire coast that was the setting for *The Pilot's Wife*, *Fortune's Rocks*, and *Sea Glass*. Here, a young widow gets drawn into a rivalry between two adult brothers, with heartbreaking consequences.



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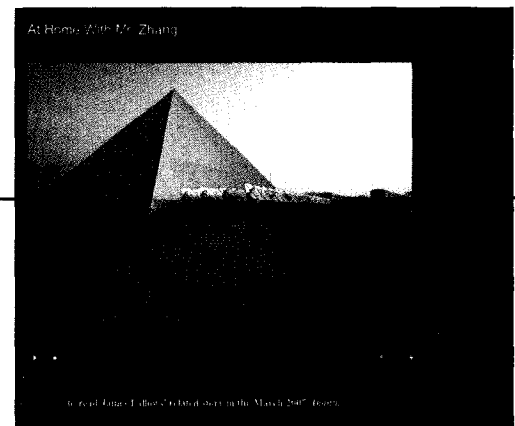


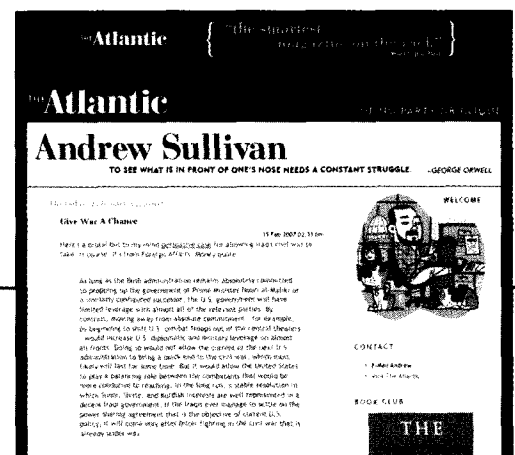
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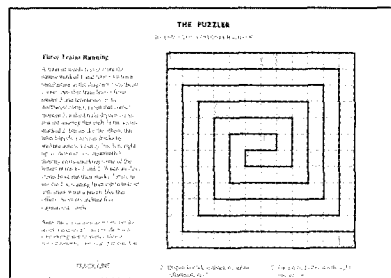
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TRAVELS

A safari by air over Namibia's haunting sands

The Skeleton Coast

BY CLIVE CROOK

Can you imagine a more pitiable fate? Your ship reels broken in the storm. Implacable winds and currents run you aground, but by a miracle, you do not drown. You overcome and drag yourself exhausted onto the sand—and then realize that drowning is not the worst way to go. You cheated death, only to find yourself cast upon one of the harshest places on Earth. You can choose to stay where you are and die of exposure or thirst. Or else you can trek hopelessly into the endless desert, to perish there instead.

All along the Skeleton Coast of Namibia, in southwestern Africa, you see the hulks of dead ships, ancient and modern. You cannot help but reflect on

the fate of the shipwrecked sailors. In many cases, what remains of their vessels now stands far back from the sea, partly covered in sand. Sometimes these relics are almost entirely buried; all you can see is a mast. Countless more, you think, have vanished altogether. What must have befallen their crews, in the days before radio and airborne rescue, requires little imagination. Sand, salt pan, and arid mountain stretch inland for a hundred miles. Away from the sea, there is little or no water—no sustenance, it seems, of any kind. When you see an animal—which you do, now and then—

you are astonished that it can eke its existence from this nothingness. No human unused to such a place ever could.

Conditions for visitors, it must be said, have improved lately. (And I am not speaking of the hulk that, during an early-20th-century spell of diamond prospecting, became what was presumably the remotest brothel in the world.) The Skeleton Coast is a bit more accessible than it used to be,

and it is beginning to be recognized as a vacation spot, though other parts of the Namib Desert, to the south, still get more visitors.

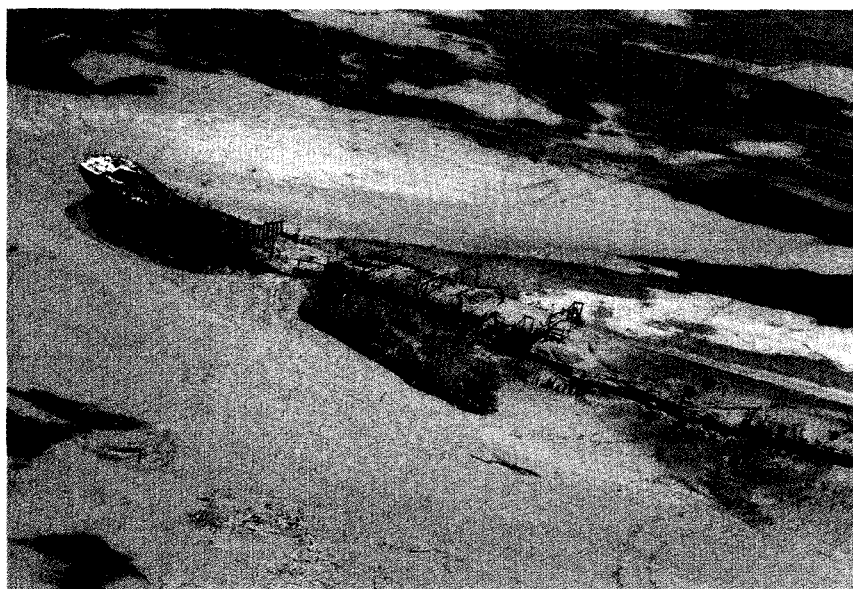
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THE TRAVEL ADVISORY

Planning a trip to southern Africa quickly gets difficult and complicated if you intend to see many different places, especially in remote areas. If you do, it's best to consult a specialist travel agency. On a personal recommendation, we used **Safari Experts** (www.safariexperts.com), run by Tim Lapage, an old Africa hand (born in Kenya, and a former bush pilot) now based in Utah. He produced a three-week itinerary for South Africa, Namibia, and Botswana that was dauntingly complex but proved consistently well chosen and was executed from start to finish without a hitch. The plan mixed city stopovers in Cape Town, Windhoek, and Johannesburg with a variety of wilderness camps—some basic, some luxurious, all of them comfortable.

For hotels, we especially enjoyed the **Cape Grace** (011 27 21 410 7100; www.capegrace.com), a handsome new property (Oprah stays there, one is told endlessly) in Cape Town's restored waterfront area, with what locals say is one of the city's best restaurants. In Windhoek, the otherwise unremarkable **Hotel Heinitzburg** (011 264 61 249 597; www.heinitzburg.com) has a lovely view of the city, and of the mountains beyond, from its restaurant terrace. See the agency's Web site for pictures and information about camps in the desert and bush.

Safari Experts' greatest service by far was to introduce us to **Skeleton Coast Safaris** (www.skeletoncoast-safaris.com), a family-owned and -operated venture, for the four-day journey in and over the Namib Desert. We had two pilot-guides: Bertus Schoeman and his wife, Helga, whose knowledge of the geography and geology of the Skeleton Coast is based on decades of familiarity with the area. They are a charming couple and great company—as they had better be, since you see a lot of them. If you can, see the Skeleton Coast at the end of your visit, not, as we did, at the beginning: It eclipses everything else.



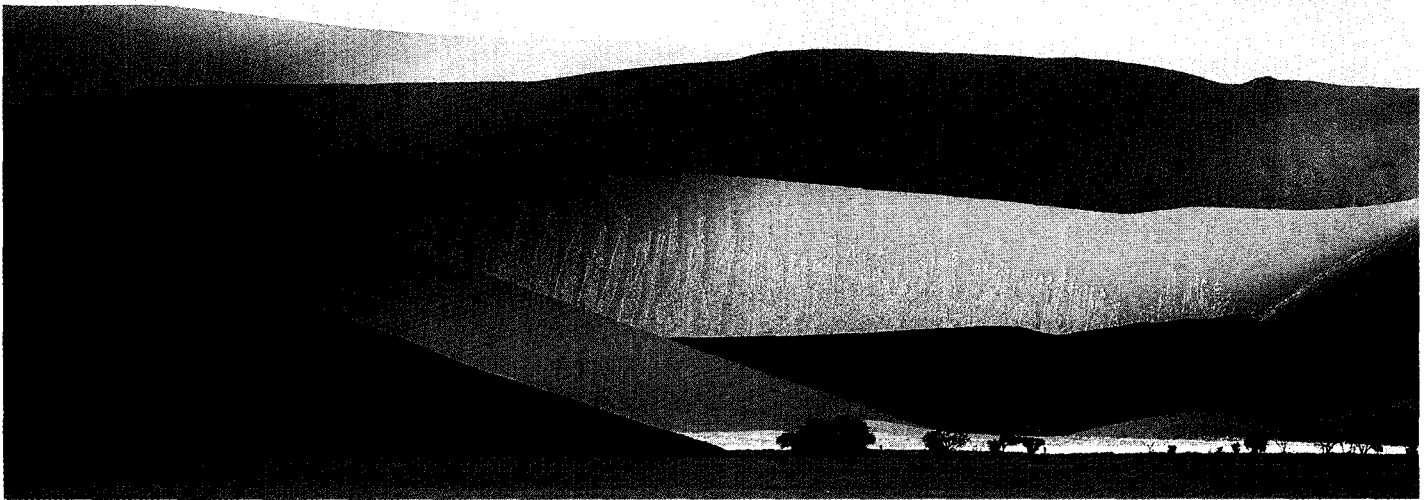
It was chiefly the southern Namib, in fact, that my wife and I had traveled to see. Landscape photography is an avocation of ours, and we had wanted to bear our tripods in homage to the famous, fabulously photogenic dunes of Sossusvlei. You are sure to have seen the pictures, perhaps without realizing where they were taken. The sand there is a vivid ochre, and it rises vertiginously 1,000 feet and higher. Strong southwesterly winds sculpt it into immense longitudinal dunes, with smooth, undulating surfaces and edges like blades. Compositionally speaking, the setting is perfect: Dry watercourses give flat approaches, with trees positioned just so, to provide scale. At sunrise or sunset the dunes cast shadows that are deep and long, and the color blazes.

Sossusvlei did not disappoint—which, given our expectations, is saying a lot—but much to our surprise, it was not the highlight of the trip. After we saw the red dunes, we flew north, via Swakopmund, on the first leg of a four-day “flying safari” over the Skeleton Coast Park. The southern section of the park, roughly between the Ugab and Hoanib rivers, is open to the public, with a couple of access points by road; and fishermen from South Africa visit the coast south of the park. But the northern section, between the Hoanib and Kunene rivers (the Kunene forms part of Namibia's border with Angola), is accessible only by light aircraft, operated

under concession. Our pilot-guides flew us and our companions over the length of the park in two six-seater planes. We hopped up the coast, driving each day by Land Rover from improvised landing strips to explore the dunes and mountains. We slept each night in a different campsite.

From the air, flying low, you are surrounded by breathtaking scenes. The beauty is unrelenting, and almost too much; you experience a kind of aesthetic overload. In the evenings, we were dazed. You don't see much wildlife, though you are low enough to get a good look at what is there: seals and flamingos along the coast, and further inland the occasional oryx (a large antelope that seems able to subsist on nothing). We spotted just two desert elephants from our duneskimming Cessna. Apparently, these rare creatures like to surf the sands; I have seen them do so on video, but cannot vouch for it firsthand.

The sands of the Skeleton Coast desert are paler than those in the southern Namib. The dunes are not as high, and the sculpting of the wind is less regular. The patterns are more chaotic and harder to photograph—yet, to my mind, even more beautiful. The expanse is awe-inspiring. We drove to high points in the dunes and, despite the modest elevation, gazed out for what must have been 20 miles. To the horizon in every direction,



there was nothing but pristine, curving planes of sand—precise edges that might have been cut with a scalpel, and surfaces minutely poised at the limit of what the laws of mechanics allow, before they flow, fall, and cascade.

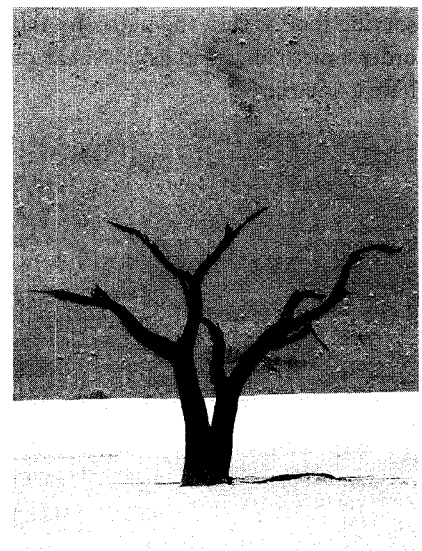
There is a wonderfully poetic technical term for that limit: the *angle of repose*. Wind blows sand up a dune and drops it, at the crest, onto the leeward side, until the angle of the leeward surface to the horizontal exceeds the angle of repose; when that critical slope is reached, the sand drops away on the leeward side, leaving a perfectly defined edge, until the angle of repose is restored.

When you disturb the sand on one of those edges, it moves like a viscous liquid, pouring over the surface beneath. From an edge, say, a hundred feet up, this film of excess sand may take minutes to move slowly but unstoppably all the way down. It is mesmerizing. All the while, of course, the dunes themselves are traveling down the wind, in endless pursuit of the angle of repose—six to 10 feet a year, it is reckoned, on average. Though it all depends: There is so much more to sand than you might think. The properties of a dune—including its angle of repose—turn on many different factors: wind, depth of material, size of the grains, shape of the grains, sorting of the grains (one size or many), dryness or dampness of the grains, and so forth.

When conditions are just right, something peculiar can happen: Sand can sing. Perhaps you are thinking I was in the dunes too long. (The grains! The grains!) No doubt some said the same of Marco Polo, after he wrote in *The Travels* about the singing sands of the Gobi Desert. Nothing but sand, he said, and yet he heard “the sounds of all kinds of musical instruments, and also of drums and the clash of arms.” He put it down to desert spirits. The people who know the Skeleton Coast talk of roaring dunes, not singing sands, but I think they are referring to the same thing.

When the sand has exactly the right characteristics, and when the correctly constituted surface forms part of a bowl with the right acoustic properties, a small flow of disturbed sand can cause a sound that builds almost immediately to a noise like rolling thunder. The phenomenon has been recognized by physicists, but the precise causes are not entirely clear. Indeed, the leading researchers seem to have fallen out over it. An editor of *Physics World* reports that two of the foremost authorities on the matter, once friends, now “tend to avoid one another.”

That must be awkward, because dunes roar in only a few places. Our guides in the Skeleton Coast knew of one. They told us to sit with our companions on the edge at the top of the dune in question, and then, on their signal, to begin



scooting down, “moving as much sand as you can.” The moment we did so—rolling our eyes and thinking, Do we really have to do this?—a deep mechanical thrumming started in the dune. The whole thing was vibrating. It felt like a small earthquake. At the same time a great noise began. I took it for a low-flying aircraft directly over my head. It was far too loud to hear each other speak. We all looked anxiously around the sky; I literally ducked. We had moved, so it seemed, just a few shovelfuls of sand. It was the strangest thing I have ever encountered. Take it from me, Marco Polo was right. Drums and the clash of arms. ▀

Clive Crook is an Atlantic senior editor.

FOOD

An exciting new Italian bazaar makes Whole Foods look like the A&P—and it's coming to America.

The Supermarket of the Future

BY CORBY KUMMER

At Eataly, a sprawling food market in Turin that opened at the end of January, you can choose fresh fish from beautiful arrays on curvy banks of ice, or beef from rare breeds prized for their meat, raised on nearby farms. If the sight of all this makes you hungry, you can sit at a high counter—at two of the nine areas serving food within the market—and order a piece of grilled fish or meat, or have it as tartare.

the topping are Miracle of San Gennaro, a particularly sweet variety of San Marzano, the best Neapolitan tomato. The cheese is not the posh yet inapt buffalo mozzarella (watery when it melts) but cow's-milk *fior di latte* from Agerola, the echt pizza cheese, made by a cheesemaker south of Naples whose production is so limited and costly that only one other pizzeria is said to use it: Da Michele, the best in Naples.

a training program created by Slow Food. Or you can finish with ice cream made of milk from nearby dairies and flavored with that Guatemalan coffee, or Sicilian pistachios—all products that Slow Food seeks to protect and promote. (I first encountered Slow Food in 1998; an article I wrote for *The Atlantic* grew into a 2002 book, *The Pleasures of Slow Food*.)

You can sit in a comfortable armchair at the front of the market and peruse the stock of books published by Slow Food, or read on any of eight Apple computers about the foods carried in the market. You can stroll past several educational displays on shelves, panels, and video screens; the most prominent of them shows the fruits and vegetables that are in season when you visit, and it leads to a row of marvelously fresh, locally grown vegetables in market-style bins. Many of the growers and food producers are likely to be at Eataly to deliver their goods, greet customers, and guide the tastings or classes frequently taking place in the market's two teaching kitchens or in the big wine-tasting room in the wine cellar.

Or, like many of the ecstatic, somewhat dazed customers of Eataly, you can start with ice cream and coffee and then get on to the real work of shopping.

Though many of the goods at Eataly are organic, the greater emphasis is on shortening the distance from farm to market. Solving transport logistics took up a good deal of the three years of planning before Eataly opened. The extensive development was underwritten by Eataly's founder and owner, Oscar Farinetti, a local entrepreneur made very good and a longtime fan of Slow Food. Signs throughout the market point out products that are in season, that come



FINALLY, A PLACE to indulge your gluttonous fantasies and your social conscience

You can eat pizza at a counter near the bakery, where bread is made in a huge, custom-built wood-fired oven sheathed in fieldstone. A young French baker named Rémy Coste devised the starters (no commercial yeast), and the bakery uses stone-ground flour milled 30 miles away by the wonderful Marino family at Mulino Marino, which grinds organically raised wheat, corn, rye, and more-exotic grains. The tomatoes for

You can finish at a wood-paneled *caffè* within the market, drinking espresso brewed from beans grown on the hillsides of Huehuetenango by a cooperative of Guatemalan farmers whose working conditions, education, and health care are supported by Slow Food, the international food movement founded in Piedmont, the region whose capital is Turin. The beans are roasted locally, over a wood fire, by apprentice roasters in a Turin prison—in

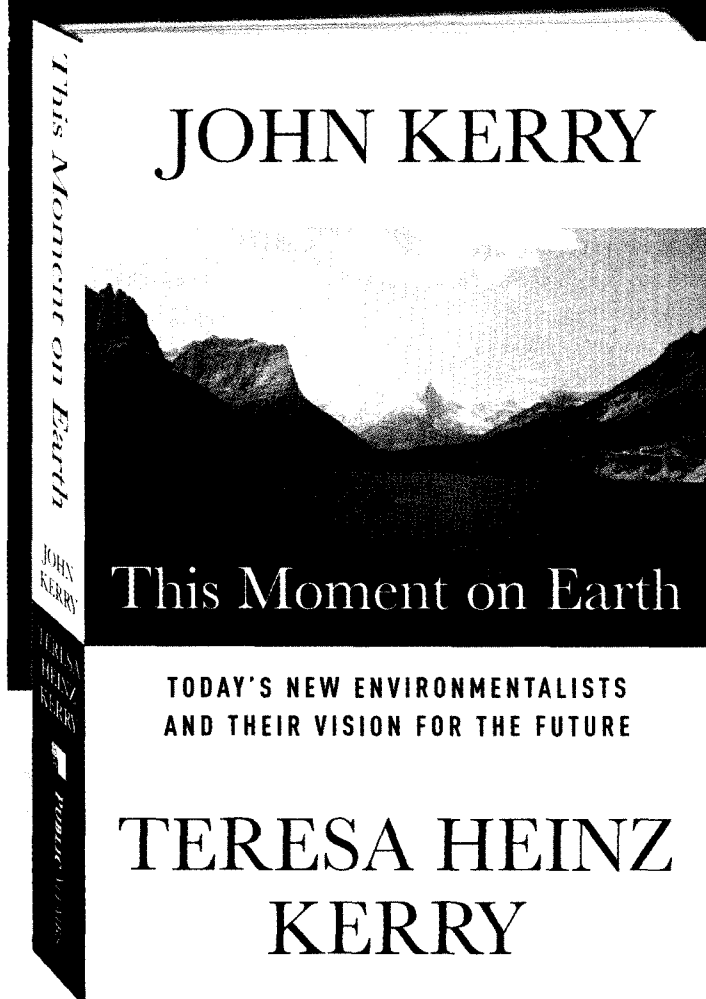
SEIZE THE MOMENT...

“John Kerry and Teresa Heinz have written a book that is a profound challenge to all of us but contains, in the examples of the men and women who are fighting the great fight for

a better future for our environment, the clear hope that if we can embrace their resourcefulness, determination and essential patriotism we will prevail.”

—AL GORE

FORMER VICE PRESIDENT



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from close by, and that are protected by Slow Food. You can fill your completely biodegradable plastic shopping bag (it even has a use-by date, showing when it starts biodegrading) with artisanal food at prices comparable to those you would pay if you visited the food producer—and much lower than those at gourmet boutiques, previously the only other places you could count on finding it. This is fancy food—the rustic, carefully raised, simple stuff that costs a fortune these days (think of Whole Foods)—at prices nonfancy folk can afford.

Eataly is an irresistible realization of every food-lover's gluttonous fantasy, paired with guilt-cleansing social conscience—a new combination of grand food hall, farm stand, continuing-education university, and throbbing urban market. Much like Boqueria, in Barcelona, and Vucciria, in Palermo,

two of the few thriving center-city markets left in Europe, Eataly draws all classes and ages at all times of day. The emphasis on local and artisanal producers, education, affordable prices, a lightened environmental footprint, and sheer fun makes Eataly a persuasive model for the supermarket of the future—one that is sure to be widely copied around the world. The question is whether Eataly will bite the hands of the people feeding it, the people it says it wants to help: Slow Food, which is the arbiter and moral center of today's food culture, and the artisans themselves.

For a decade, the promise of rare and wonderful artisanal foods, wines, beers, and coffees from around the world has brought paying throngs to Slow Food's Salone del Gusto, an international food fair held every other year since 1996 in the same development where Eataly just opened. At each Salone, Carlo Petrini, Slow Food's founder, has announced the movement's grand new initiatives—the preservation of endangered local foods; environmentalism; social justice for the people who grow and produce food—and each one has drawn hundreds of new members. Now Eataly is offering much of the Salone's greedy excitement every day, leaving Slow Food to hope that international artisans and chefs will still attract crowds to its food fair—and that the take will still help subsidize Terra Madre, its hugely expensive new conference concurrent with the Salone, which brings together thousands of farmers and food producers from around the world, many of whom have never before left their villages. The idea of Terra Madre (which is not open to the public and does not sell food) is to create, through seminars, workshops, shared meals, and casual encounters, a new kind of network whose strength, Slow Food hopes, will eventually challenge the international food industry.

Purists long upset by the corporate banners at the Salone see Slow Food's role in launching Eataly—it provided a team of veteran tasters and opened its address book of artisans—as the

definitive sellout. Slow Food itself is taking a somewhat cautious approach to the collaboration. It's strictly a consulting arrangement, Roberto Burdese, Petrini's longtime right hand and now the head of Slow Food Italy, told me. Slow Food continues to forbid the use of its snail logo on any product label. If the great care Eataly has taken in choosing its products were to be compromised, Burdese told me, or its commitment to local and small producers eroded, Slow Food would not renew its current agreement with Eataly.

Nothing much is likely to stop Farinetti, an informal man with a halo of curly gray hair, a wide, open face, and a friendly but shrewd expression. I got the sense that the fun he's having with the market would be worth the 20 million euros he has already put into it. And Eataly, he told me, with a daily average of 8,000 visitors, is already headed into the black in its first year. He plans to open markets in nine other Italian cities, beginning in Genoa and going across and then down the country. In each place he will look for city-center, not suburban-mall, buildings, like the vermouth factory he restored in Turin, and offer host cities free restoration in exchange for concessionary rents. He also plans to open a small Eataly (8,000 square feet as compared with 118,000 in Turin) in Rockefeller Center, with two restaurants, next year—a showcase for the Italian chain, with Italian packaged goods. He mentioned even grander dreams of opening full-scale Eatalys in the New York City metropolitan area, but more in the five-year than one-year range.

Farinetti says he made his fortune selling optimism. Actually it was appliances, in a chain of a hundred markets that grew out of an electronics section in the supermarket started by his father, a third-generation pasta maker. The chain's witty, peppy commercials juxtaposed washing machines with flocks of birds symbolizing hope. But however great his success (he sold the chain in 2002 for around 500 million euros), Farinetti wanted to get back into the original family business. Even while in the

PIEDMONT PLEASURES

Three great Eataly foods available here now

Il Mongetto sauces

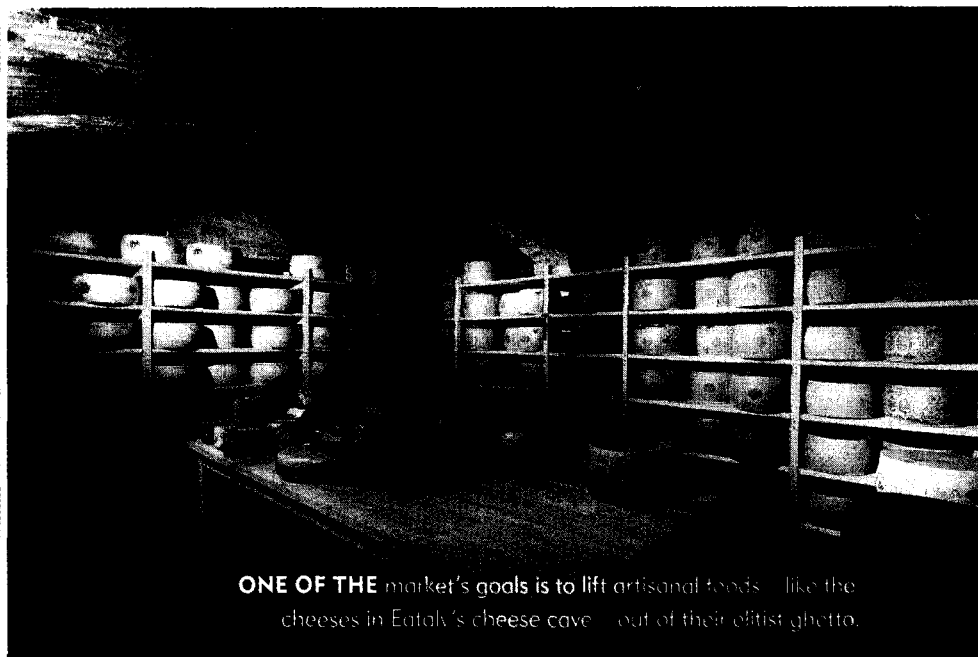
This Piedmont producer makes intense tomato sauce that's a great base for any sort of pasta sauce, but try the *diavolo*, a regional specialty made with tuna, anchovies, and piquant cherry peppers; it's served with polenta (www.zingermans.com).

Acquerello rice

Organic rice from the paddies of Piedmont, subject of the neorealist film *Bitter Rice*, carefully grown and innovatively packaged, with a delicate but authoritative flavor and the al dente texture perfect for risotto (www.chefscatalog.com).

Polenta from Mulino Marino

Coarse-ground cornmeal made of a low-yielding, high-flavor corn—the staple food of Piedmont, ground on hand-sharpened French millstones by a Piedmont family that has redefined milling by following old traditions and finding new sources of ancient grains (www.formaggio-kitchen.com).



ONE OF THE market's goals is to lift artisanal foods—like the cheeses in Eataly's cheese cave—out of their elitist ghetto.

appliance business, he had started buying restaurants (he now owns 10), and once he got out of it he bought interests in several producers he particularly liked—and a pasta maker south of Naples outright. Farinetti grew up in Piedmont, a friend and contemporary of Petrini's, and like Petrini had a socialist family background; his father was an officer in the partisan resistance during World War II. Farinetti took a strong interest in Petrini's Slow Food from the start, and has given money to the organization's new University of Gastronomic Sciences, some of whose graduates he already employs.

His full-steam-ahead approach and relatively unlimited resources worry artisanal-food supporters. Eataly will suck small producers dry, they told me when I visited. (Practically every conversation I had in and around Turin began, "Have you been to Eataly?") Artisans will denature themselves struggling to increase production, only to be stranded when Eataly finds a cheaper competitor and stops ordering, the worriers said; Eataly muddies the small-producer message by stocking some products made by big companies. Piero Rondolino is the owner of Acquerello, a producer of excellent organic Piedmont rice for risotto. "Lavazza and Novi don't need any more publicity," he said, speaking of two big

and successful Piedmont food producers represented on Eataly shelves. "I do."

The counterarguments Farinetti offered me reflect his take-a-chance optimism. He encourages producers *not* to promise Eataly all of what they can make, he said, so that they will retain a healthy diversity of customers. If small producers don't seize on this chance to grow, when can they? Who else will help them dream the big dream? According to Farinetti, the cooperative that raises the rare-breed meat Eataly sells (a co-op in which he has a financial interest) was already telling other Piedmont livestock farmers that if they changed their feed to include more grass and less commercial feed, they could now have a guaranteed market; the co-op is achieving its first expansion after years of trying to attract new farmers. The point is to get young people to see artisanal food as a viable career option and to lift artisanal foods out of their elitist ghetto. "*Niche* is the most vulgar word I know," he said.

Farinetti, then, is making his own rules and having a very good time doing it. Yes, Eataly prominently features the wares of companies he already owns or has invested in (including the meat cooperative). Nearly every shopper buys a package of pasta—often his Pasta di Gragnano—and in the market's separate

mineral-water room, the most visible brand is Lurisia, in which he has a controlling interest. But his philosophy and whimsy are visible too. Most of the water, his and the competition's, is sold in glass, which Farinetti (rightly) thinks makes it taste better. And he sought out and sells a fizzy, not-too-sweet lemon soda in a trim bottle with a finger-friendly crease near the top and a little glass ball at the neck—a drink and a bottle that had been out of circulation for 40 years, and a cause of nostalgic tears for many of the pensioners who populate the market in the morning. His goal was to create a bazaar, a casbah, and he succeeded. Eataly is drawing attention to individual producers with a specificity, completeness, and lack of dilution by house and industrial brands that no supermarket in the United States can match.

In the packaged-foods area a whole set of shelves is devoted to different sizes of empty canning jars that Eataly commissioned from the French glassmaker Saint-Gobain. (A line of nicely designed and cheap china, glass, and tools is sold in a separate department.) Why? Because the best food is the kind you grow and put up yourself. So far, at least, the messages Eataly sends are the ones everyone who buys food should get. ▀

Corby Kummer is an Atlantic senior editor.

Congress Shall Make No Law...

The National Tragedy of
the Supreme Court's Misjudgment on Obscenity

UNHAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Fifty Years Since Roth v. United States

Daniel Mark Cohen

In UNHAPPY ANNIVERSARY, Daniel Mark Cohen hands down a devastating indictment of the United States Supreme Court for the immaculate failure of its obscenity jurisprudence and the consequent corruption of American children by Internet pornography.

Cohen argues that contrary to the rule of American law, but as a matter of common sense, speech is properly defined in terms of words, and so pictures do not constitute a form of speech. Hence, pornography, while it may be shielded by other provisions of the Constitution, is not entitled to the supreme protection of the First Amendment.

At last, UNHAPPY ANNIVERSARY constitutes an impassioned statement of advocacy for a forsaken constituency in this country: more than sixty million children who have been effectively abandoned by the United States Supreme Court and the American nation as a whole.

WHEN THE FOUNDING FATHERS ratified the First Amendment, they chose to cast the free speech provision in figurative terms:

"Congress shall make no law . . .
abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press."

The same rule of law rendered literally is:

"Congress shall make no law . . .
abridging the freedom of [the spoken word],
or of the [printed word]."

Certainly, in adopting the First Amendment, the Founding Fathers did not mean:

"Congress shall make no law . . .
abridging the freedom to distribute photographic
images of women and men engaged in acts of prostitution."

And yet, in effect, the latter proposition is precisely the rule of law established and upheld by the United States Supreme Court over the past five decades.

THE FIRST AMENDMENT was conceived, composed, and ratified to protect *words*, the exclusive medium by which human beings translate political and social ideas into communicable language. That is to say, the word "speech" as used in the First Amendment is properly defined almost exclusively in terms of *words*. In contrast, *pictures* do not constitute a form of speech, although to the degree such images serve to advance political and social ideas, and so, appeal to a man's Reason, they are properly classified as a variant form of speech. The political cartoon, a unique hybrid of word and image, is the clearest example. But pornography, that is, photographic representations of women engaged in acts of prostitution, created to appeal, not to a man's Reason, but rather to excite and advance his sexual desire, is not a form of speech, and so, is not properly entitled to protection by the First Amendment.

"Without virtue, there can be no political liberty."
— John Adams

UNHAPPY ANNIVERSARY

FIFTY YEARS SINCE ROTH V. UNITED STATES

The National Tragedy of the Supreme Court's Misjudgment on Obscenity

BY DANIEL MARK COHEN

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CULTURE AND COMMERCE

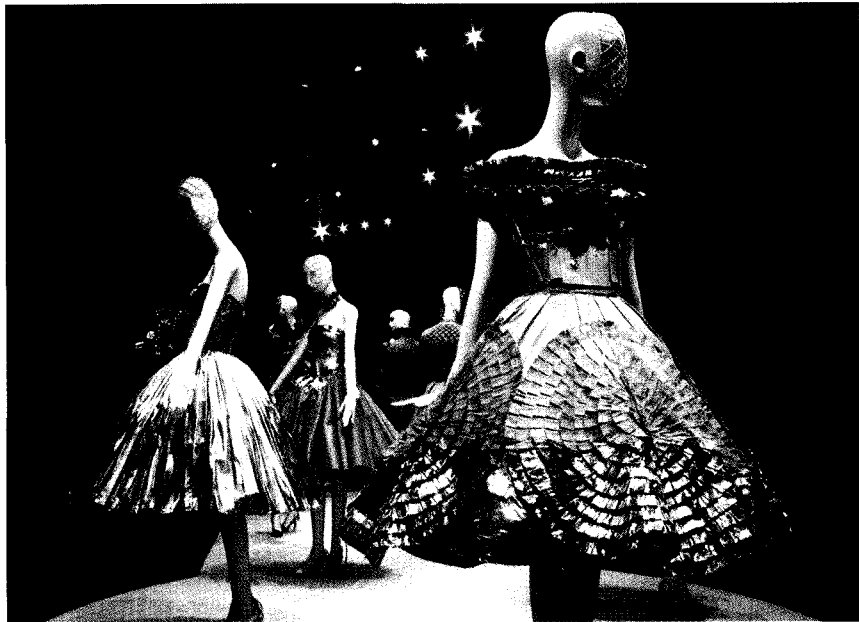
Why fashion deserves its place in art museums

Dress Sense

BY VIRGINIA POSTREL

On May 7, the rich, famous, and beautiful will parade into the Metropolitan Museum of Art wearing their best, or most interesting, clothes, pausing for photographers along the obligatory red carpet. Once inside, the 700 guests—actors and models, designers and socialites—will dine and dance and preview the museum's newest exhibition, "Poiret: King of Fashion." The occasion is the "party of the year," the Met's Costume Institute Benefit Gala. Co-chaired annually by *Vogue* editor in chief Anna Wintour, usually with a movie star (Cate Blanchett this year) and a fashion designer (Nicolas Ghesquière), the party is not just a chance to wear and admire beautiful clothes; it's a lavish and efficient fund-raising machine. Tickets start at \$6,500 per person, with tables for 10 running as high as \$100,000. Last year's gala raised \$4.5 million for the museum's fashion department.

While only the Met commands that sort of glitz, fashion collections throughout the country are enjoying a new prominence. When the Philadelphia Museum of Art opens a new building this spring, its space for costume and textile exhibitions will nearly triple. Boston's Museum of Fine Arts recently devoted its main special-exhibition gallery to a display of straight-off-the-runway selections from 10 Paris houses, the first costume-department exhibit to occupy that space since 1989. For the first time in its 28-year history, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles included fashion in an exhibit, "Skin + Bones," which examined connections between architecture and clothing design. The Meadows Museum in Dallas is currently featuring a retrospective of Basque-born couturier Cristóbal Balenciaga's



MODEL EXHIBIT: Viktor & Rolf's Winter 2006 collection on display at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts

mid-century work, across from galleries devoted to such Spanish masters as Velázquez, El Greco, and Goya.

But despite huge public interest—or perhaps because of it—fashion departments still find themselves constantly required to justify their existence. Denita Sewell, the Phoenix Art Museum's curator of fashion design, sputters her frustration with presumably sophisticated New York critics who seem to begin every review of a fashion exhibition not by asking whether the show's concept is valid or the pieces are good but whether museums should show fashion at all. "Somebody has poured their heart out working on this show, and the first question is 'Why are you in here?'" Gosh, can we move on from that? It just—I mean, the collection

has been here since 1966. Why are we still discussing this?"

The Boston exhibit's comment book records a debate between fans, mostly women, who praise the museum for displaying an "inspiring" and "seldom seen" art form and detractors, mostly men, who decry its descent into commercialism. "What's next? Victoria's Secret's Xmas Collection?" writes one. "People in the museum world complain that fashion is not art, and they think it is unworthy of being in an art museum," says Valerie Steele, the director of the Museum at the Fashion Institute

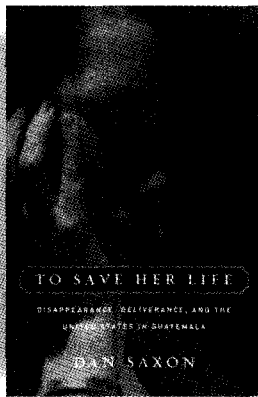
of Technology. "Fashion is really seen as the bastard child of capitalism and female vanity."

Behind the criticism of fashion as an artistic medium is a highly ideological

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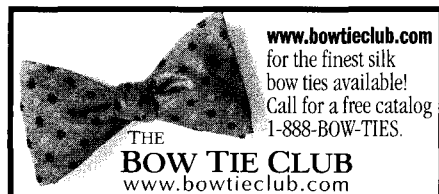


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prejudice: against markets, against consumers, against the dynamism of Western commercial society. The debate is not about art but about culture and economics. Critics who decry fashion collections are less troubled by the prescribed costumes of dynastic China or the aristocratic dress of baroque France than by the past century's clothes. With its fluctuating forms and needless decoration, fashion epitomizes the supposedly unproductive waste that inspired 20th-century technocrats to dream of central planning. It exists for no good reason. But that's practically a definition of art.

Prejudice aside, it's hard to come up with objections to fashion collections that don't apply to other museum departments. Fashion is mass produced? So are prints and posters, often more so than haute couture. Ephemeral? So are works on paper. Utilitarian? So are pots and vases. Customized to an individual? So were suits of armor. As for the fickleness of fashion, the history of Western art is a story of changing styles. And however much critics may despise commerce, many undisputed masterpieces were works for hire. "Paintings were marketable goods which competed for the attention of the purchaser," writes the historian Michael North in *Art and Commerce in the Dutch Golden Age*. Michelangelo and Ghiberti got paid.

The real question is not whether museums are too good for fashion but whether they're good enough. Clothes are unique sculptures, dependent on a supporting human form and created to move. Yet museum mannequins stand still. Clothing is made to be seen and touched—the tactile qualities of fabric are as essential to the art as a garment's color or shape—but light and fingertips dim colors and degrade fabrics. The first rule of fashion exhibitions is *Do not touch*.

Any fashion exhibition is thus a compromise. But, of course, altarpieces weren't meant to be ripped from their candlelit sacred context and put up on museum walls to be admired by nonbelievers. The Elgin Marbles were supposed to be on the Parthenon. For many works of art, a museum is an artificial setting—

a zoo, not a natural habitat. Some zoos, however, are worse than others.

Take the Costume Institute's permanent galleries in the basement of the Met, where garments are displayed in dimly lit glass cases lining the walls. Visitors can see each object only from a single angle. But clothes, like sculpture, are three-dimensional art. An evening gown's plunging back may contrast with a modest front—think of Hilary Swank's dress at the 2005 Oscars—but you can't appreciate the relationship if you can see only one side. No wonder the recent exhibition of the late socialite Nan Kempner's extraordinary wardrobe seemed less like an art retrospective than a series of crowded shop windows, a tribute less to Yves Saint Laurent's or Madame Grès' work than to Kempner's buying power.

Elsewhere curators have mostly dispensed with the glass, relying on decorum and guards to keep corrosive fingers off the clothes. The result is a much fuller experience of the art. "If it is lit well, you can really see the details, and you can see the surface and hand of the fabric," says Steele. No photograph can adequately convey the cascades of seemingly weightless pinked ruffles and the precise yet delicate pleats of the Rodarte evening gown on display in Phoenix. Like an impressionist painting, it has to be seen firsthand.

The best of fashion, like the best of fine art, offers not only nuance to the connoisseur but also immediate pleasure to the uninitiated. The familiarity of clothes makes fashion exhibits accessible, but that very familiarity also highlights the difference between daily dress and museum-quality garments. "At the time when people are getting fatter and dressing more casually than ever before—jeans at the opera!—there is an increase in interest in very fashionable dress," notes Sewell, the Phoenix curator.

The challenge for fashion curators is to balance aesthetics and history, pleasure and meaning. The Met's 2001 exhibit of Jackie Kennedy's White House wardrobe was wildly popular, but it made little sense in a museum dedicated to aesthetic masterworks. Kennedy's clothes were derivative of French fashions, interesting

for what they reveal about the first lady's self-conscious image-building but not for any fashion innovation. They belonged in a history museum.

If museums treat fashion purely as art for art's sake, however, they risk draining the medium of what makes it distinctive and meaningful—not only its aesthetic elements but its connection to history and the human body. Fashion is, as Steele has insisted since she was a Yale doctoral student, a part of cultural history, and the relationship goes both ways. No history of business or chemistry explains the appeal of aniline dyes as powerfully as coming upon the 1860 purple-and-black striped dress in FIT's current exhibition on color in fashion. (One of FIT's two exhibitions is always historical, for the benefit of fashion students.)

Three years ago, the Met's "Dangerous Liaisons" exhibit showcased 18th-century costumes in the museum's period rooms, creating dramatic vignettes of mannequins socializing in naturalistic poses. The clothes were not only beautiful but, shown in their physical and social context, culturally understandable despite their extreme artifice. The clothes, furniture, and interior design became not just displays of luxury and handcraft but tools for seduction and self-expression, relating the unfamiliar setting to universal human behaviors. Emphasizing romantic intrigue, says Harold Koda, the Costume Institute's curator in charge, "is a way in which one can get a contemporary audience to look at 18th-century dress that doesn't look like Cinderella."

Great fashion, like any museum-worthy art, is both timeless and time-bound, recalling the tension between the classic claims of art and the work's origin in a specific time and place. As Steele says: "We are trying to convey the story of fashion, the appeal of fashion, the experience of fashion. Fashion is about change. It is about changing silhouettes, and it is about new ways of presenting yourself to the world." It is, in short, an ideal art form for modern times. ▀

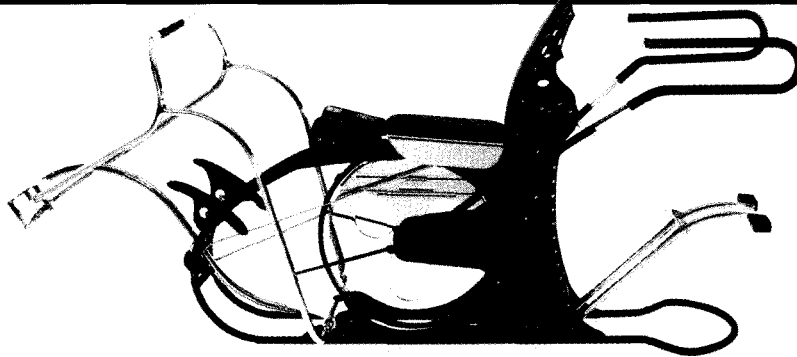
Virginia Postrel is an *Atlantic* contributing editor and the author of *The Substance of Style* (2003) and *The Future and Its Enemies* (1998). Her blog, the *Dynamist*, can be found at www.dynamist.com/weblog.

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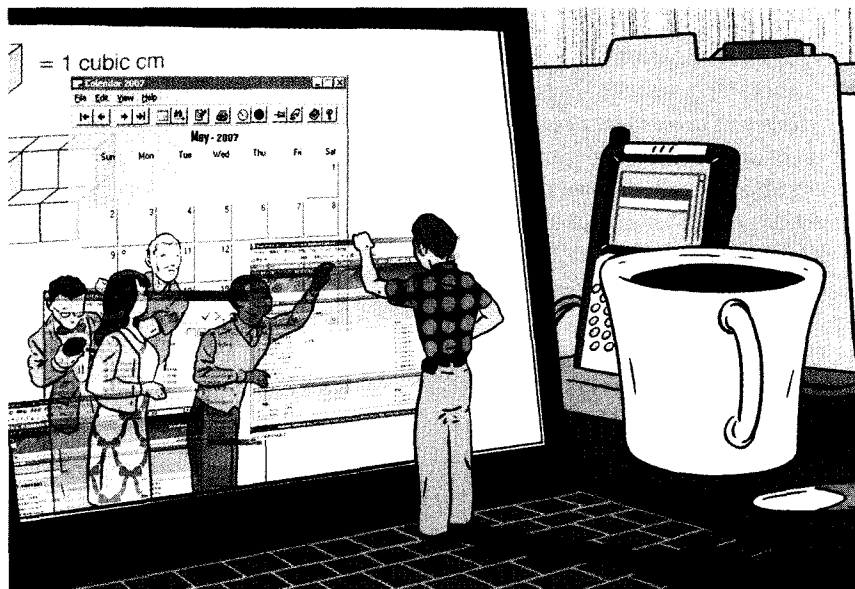
Group Therapy

BY JAMES FALLOWS

Computers are great for purely individual activity. Creating your own documents, storing your own photos, saving your own e-mail—this is why they were called “personal” computers in the first place. With the spread of broadband Internet access, ordinary desktop and laptop computers have also become tools for activities that connect thousands or millions of participants. Online games with millions of players around the world, vast virtual marketplaces like eBay, the collective knowledge piling up in news reports and blogs all indexed for rapid retrieval—none of these were possible 20 years ago, and all are easy now.

Where computer technology falls short is in the zone between the individual and the universal. Here I’m referring to the efforts of the small groups or teams—numbering a few people to a few dozen—through which much of the world’s work actually gets done, including within large organizations. Major software firms have long recognized the importance of providing better systems for such “workgroup” or “collaborative” projects. Their offerings have tended to be very specific or very grandiose.

The specific features, like “Track Changes” in Microsoft Word or Adobe Acrobat’s similar “Review and Comment,” are indispensable but limited. Usually they don’t “scale” easily, so they can get overwhelmed if too many users make too many comments. The grandiose solutions are comprehensive, company-wide systems like SharePoint and Groove, both from Microsoft, and Domino, Notes, and Connections, from Lotus/IBM. These products can do almost anything: coordinate schedules and deadlines for participants in large-scale projects, create searchable databases of corporate



information, automatically connect colleagues with similar research interests in different parts of an organization. But they have the predictable drawbacks of complex, standardized systems, including being very difficult for mere mortals to set up and maintain.

In practice, small-group collaboration that can’t be handled face to face takes place mainly through the imperfect medium of e-mail. Everyone recognizes e-mail’s benefits and also its drawbacks: long, hard-to-follow threads, confusion over who is responsible for what, and simple oversupply. In 2004, a young CNet sales manager named Isaac Garcia was coordinating a multimillion-dollar deal with Microsoft and several smaller companies. More than 50 people were involved in the effort—“and we ran the whole thing, all the deadlines and specs, over e-mail, which just drove me crazy,” Garcia told me recently. “It blew me away that even at Microsoft, it was just too much work to set up their own

official collaboration system.” Based on that and similar experiences, Garcia and his business partner, Arnulf Hsu, founded the Central Desktop company two years ago in Pasadena, California; both were then barely into their 30s but already had two successful start-ups behind them. Their Central Desktop program is one of a rapidly growing array of Web-based solutions to the collaboration problem. Other well-known ones are Basecamp, from the 37signals company of Chicago, and WebOffice, from WebEx Communications of Santa Clara, California. WebEx is the only publicly traded company in this group, and its system is thought to outsell the others. The similar, popular JotSpot program was taken off the market last fall after its creator, the Jot company of Palo Alto, California, was acquired by Google. Presumably it will reemerge in some future Google offering.

The programs have different emphases and features, but all of them are good. All offer free-trial periods, so you can get

a feel for how they work. All are designed to be quick and easy to set up and use, so that non-nerds don't have to pore through confusing manuals or call the IT department if they'd like to create a project site. That is to say, they're meant to be easy enough that ordinary people will actually use them—as they have learned to use e-mail, spreadsheets, and, increasingly, blogs. And most apply the “wiki” model to coordinating projects.

A wiki is an online site where one or more users can very easily enter or edit information; Wikipedia is the most famous example. Google has given users a limited taste of the wiki approach to collaboration with its Google Docs & Spreadsheets programs, online counterparts to programs like Word and Excel. The documents you create with them are stored in encrypted form on Google's servers, rather than on your hard drive. You and other people you authorize can log on via any Internet connection to view the documents and make comments or changes—all of them tracked, so everyone can see who has done what. Team members at different sites can all look at the same document at once. (NoteShare, from AquaMinds, is an elegant program that allows Macintosh users to share documents in a wiki fashion.)

The new collaboration tools extend the logic and richness of this process. For instance: Karl Hausker, deputy director of a nonprofit group called the Center for Climate Strategies, explained to me how his organization uses Central Desktop. The organization has more than 20 employees scattered across the United States and Canada. “The torrent of e-mail pouring into all of our computers was driving us nuts,” he said. “So few people have secretaries anymore, there is no one to turn to when you need to compare calendars or schedule meetings or calls. Pretty soon you have a dozen crisscrossing ‘Reply All’ e-mails to sort through, with little or no indication of their importance or priority.”

Two years ago, Hausker set up a Central Desktop site where team members can log in to check the project calendar, note when they are and aren't free for

meetings or calls, track assigned tasks and mark progress, post reference reports to a common library, and comment on and edit documents, with no confusion about which is the current version. The easiest way to imagine such a workspace is as something like a shared version of Outlook, where members of a team can see not only their own to-do lists, deadlines, and so on but also those of their colleagues. The systems can be arranged to notify members by e-mail when there is something new for them to do or check. Hausker said that his other team members found the system painless to learn and use, so that now “it is the glue that holds us together.”

Of the systems mentioned here, Basecamp has the most passionate loyalists and, occasionally, detractors; it is to the online-collaboration world what Apple is to computing. Its founder, Jason Fried, now in his early 30s, is a former Web designer who created the program because he was unhappy with the systems available for managing his own projects. “Everything we do starts as a need for our own business,” he told me. “We know that if we need something, a lot of other businesses are likely to need roughly the same thing.” The Basecamp blog, Signal vs. Noise (tinyurl.com/8obl), written by Fried and the other seven members of his company, is a platform for their design concept of elegant minimalism.

Garcia and Hsu are more flexible about adding features to their Central Desktop—for instance, a way you can quickly create a Web conference with other team members when you see that they are online. WebOffice is the most feature-rich and expensive of the three. The cheapest usable version of Basecamp (the free version is extremely limited) is \$12 per month; Central Desktop's is \$25, with plenty of online storage; WebOffice's is \$59.95. But the systems have so many varied pricing offers, depending on number of users and amount of storage space (plus other factors), that you should check for yourself. Maybe I can persuade members of my workgroup to start checking too. ▀

James Fallows is an Atlantic national correspondent.

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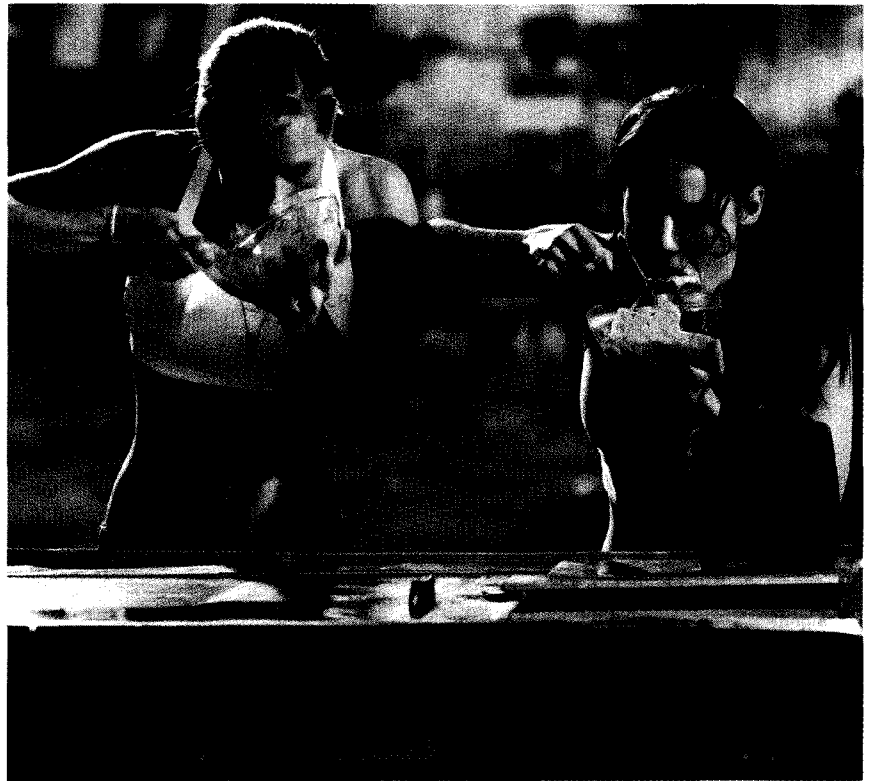
The Case for Reality TV

BY MICHAEL HIRSCHORN

This past January, I had the pleasure of serving as official spear-catcher for a *CBS Evening News* report on the increasing levels of humiliation on *American Idol* and other reality-TV shows, including some on my channel, VH1. The segment featured snippets of our shows *I Love New York* (a dating competition with an urban vibe) and *Celebrity Fit Club* (which tracks the efforts of overweight singers and actors to get back in shape, and, by extension, reignite their careers). "VH1, among other things, showcases faded celebrities who are fat," said the CBS correspondent Richard Schlesinger.

In between shots of me fake working at my computer and fake chatting with the amiable Schlesinger while fake strolling down our corporate-looking hallway, I took my best shot at defending the alleged horrors of *AI* and *Celebrity Fit Club*. But it was clear that CBS News was set on bemoaning what it saw as yet another outrage against the culture. The central complaint, per Katie Couric's intro to the report, was that more people had watched *American Idol* the previous week than watched the State of the Union address on all the broadcast networks combined. When the segment ended, Couric signed off with an extravagant eye roll. "We're doing our part here at CBS News," she seemed to be saying, "but the barbarians are massing at the gates, people." A line had been drawn in the sand, as if the news were now akin to an evening at the Met.

Is there an easier position to take in polite society than to patronize reality TV? Even television programmers see the genre as a kind of visual Hamburger Helper: cheap filler that saves them money they can use elsewhere for more-worthy programming. Reality shows cost



LAPPING IT UP: Contestants on *Fear Factor* test their limits.

anywhere from a quarter to half as much to produce as scripted shows. The money saved on *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, the logic goes, allows ABC to pay for additional gruesome medical emergencies and exploding ferries on *Grey's Anatomy*. NBC's crappy *Fear Factor* pays for the classy *Heroes*.

As befits a form driven largely by speed and cost considerations, reality TV is not often formally daring. Fifteen years after MTV's *The Real World* set the template for contemporary reality TV by placing seven strangers in a downtown Manhattan loft, reality television has developed its own visual shorthand: short doses of documentary footage interspersed with testimonials (often

called OTFs, for "on-the-fly" interviews) in which the participants describe, ex post facto, what they were thinking during the action you are watching.

The current boom may be a product of the changing economics of the television business, but reality TV is also the liveliest genre on the set right now. It has engaged hot-button cultural issues—class, sex, race—that respectable television, including the august *CBS Evening News*, rarely touches. And it has addressed a visceral need for a different kind of television at a time when the Web has made more traditionally produced video seem as stagey as Molière.

Reality TV may be an awkward admixture of documentary (with its

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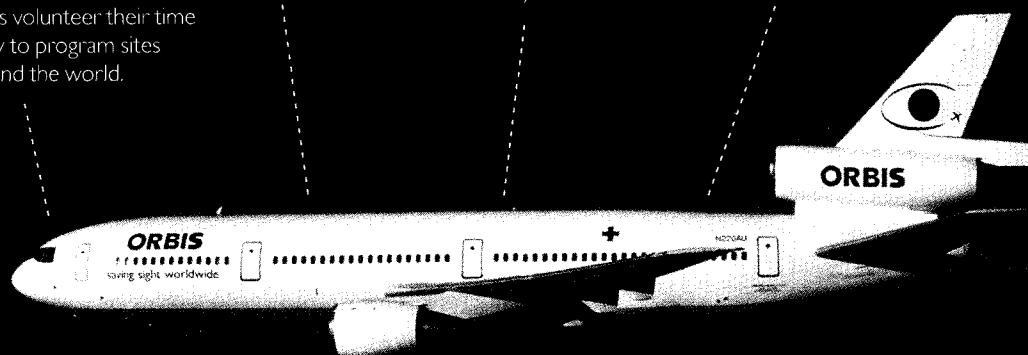
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connotations of thousands of hours of footage patiently gathered, redacted by monk-like figures into the purest expression of truth possible in 90 to 120 minutes) and scripted (with its auteurs and Emmys and noble overtones of craft). But this kludge also happens to have allowed reality shows to skim the best elements of scripted TV and documentaries while eschewing the problems of each. Reality shows steal the story structure and pacing of scripted television, but leave behind the canned plots and characters. They have the visceral impact of documentary

Catch, which began its third season in April, is an oddly transfixing series about ... crab fishermen in the Bering Sea. As a straightforward documentary, *Catch* would have been worthy fodder, but the producers have made it riveting by formatting the whole season as a sporting event, with crab tallies for each of the half dozen or so boats and a race-against-the-clock urgency that, for all its contrivance, gives structure and meaning to the fishermen's efforts.

Narrative vibrancy is not the only thing that electrifies these shows. Reality TV presents some of the most vital

inhabitants grasping for meaning and happiness as they steer their Escalades across Southern California's perfectly buffed, featureless landscape. *Crash*, the 2006 Oscar winner, trafficked in similar white California dread, but with all the nuance of a two-by-four to the face.

In *Real Housewives*, businessman Lou Knickerbocker stages a photo shoot to promote his new "highly oxygenated" water, variously called "Aqua Air" and "O.C. Energy Drink" ("We have patented technology that produces water from air"). The models are attractive-ish teen and 20-something girls: Lou's daughter Lindsey, by ex-wife Tammy; a few other daughters of O.C. housewives; and a newcomer whom Lou apparently found waitressing at a local restaurant.

Lou and Tammy made piles of money—it's not clear how—but their finances seem to have fractured along with their marriage. The photo shoot, therefore, is throwing off more than the normal amount of flop sweat. Lou apparently has personally selected the girls, which means he has declined to showcase his other daughter, Megan, because of her tattoos and lack of physical fitness. Lou believes the "Aqua Air Angels" should embody the Aqua Air ideal, which is why they can't drink or smoke and must have grade-point averages higher than 3.5. "This is a photo shoot," he barks after a fight breaks out between one of the girls and the waitress, "not a gang bang, for chrissakes."

The detail is what puts the scene over: Lou's lip-smacking focus on the girls, the girls' bland acquiescence. "That's it, baby, smile," Lou urges his daughter. "Show those teeth," says Tammy. A similar scenario on *Desperate Housewives* could never have been quite this preposterous, quite this blandly amoral. The characters would have been scripted with softening, redeeming qualities, or been rendered comically evil. Lou would've gotten his comeuppance, like Wallace Shawn's money-siphoning literary agent in that series. Here, the apparent willingness of the young women and at least some of the parents to indulge Lou's bottom-of-the-barrel scheming outlines,

The best moments found on reality TV are unscriptable, or beyond the grasp of most scriptwriters.

reportage without the self-importance and general lugubriousness. Where documentaries must construct their narratives from found matter, reality TV can place real people in artificial surroundings designed for maximum emotional impact.

Scripted television is supposedly showing new ambition these days, particularly in the hour-long drama form. *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* was going to bring the chatty intelligence of *The West Wing* back to prime time. *Lost* was going to challenge network audiences like never before, with complex plots, dozens of recurring characters, and movie-level production values. Shows are bigger now: On 24 this season, a nuclear bomb exploded. But network prime-time television remains dominated by variants on the police procedural (*Law & Order*, *CSI*, *Criminal Minds*), in which a stock group of characters (ethnically, sexually, and generationally diverse) grapples with endless versions of the same dilemma. The episodes have all the ritual predictability of Japanese Noh theater: Crimes are solved, lessons are learned, order is restored.

Reality shows have leaped into this imaginative void. Discovery's *Deadliest*

political debate in America, particularly about class and race. Fox's *Nanny 911* and ABC's *Supernanny* each offer object lessons on the hazards of parenting in an age of instant gratification and endless digital diversion. ABC's *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* features intensely emotional tales of people who have fallen through the cracks of Bush-era America—often blue-collar families ravaged by disease, health-care costs, insurance loopholes, layoffs, and so forth. My channel's *The (White) Rap-er Show* turned into a running debate among the aspiring white MCs over cultural authenticity—whether it is more properly bestowed by class or race.

Class realities are plumbed to remarkable effect on *The Real Housewives of Orange County*, a "docu soap" that completed its second season on Bravo this spring. The show is inspired by a trio of suburban dramas: *The O.C.*, *Desperate Housewives*, and the 1999 movie *American Beauty*. Lacking the visual panache, or the budgets, of its scripted forebears, *Real Housewives* nonetheless goes deeper, charting the spiritual decay of life in gated communities, where financial anxieties, fraying families, and fear of aging leave

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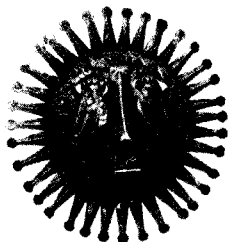
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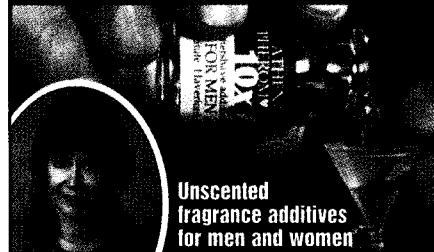
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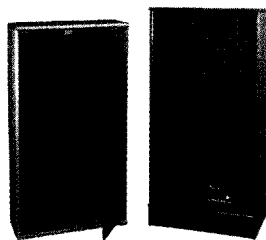
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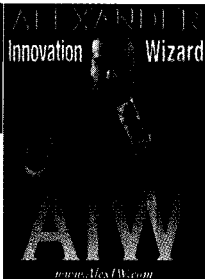
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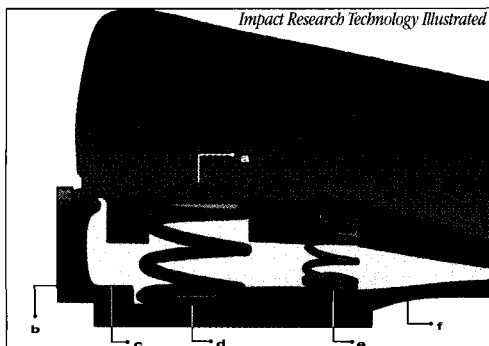
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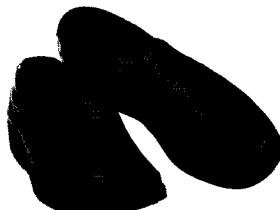
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in a few short brushstrokes, a community's shared value system.

Value systems are smashed into each other, like atoms in an accelerator, on ABC's *Wife Swap*, where the producers find the most extreme pairings possible: lesbian mommies with bigots, godless cosmopolites with Bible thumpers. On one February show, a Pentacostal family, the Hoovers, was paired with the family of a former pastor, Tony Meeks, who has turned from God to follow his rock-and-roll dreams (mom Tish rocks out as well). "I feel by being there," Kristin Hoover said, "I was able to remind Tony that God still loves him and is not finished with him." The episode took seriously the Hoovers' commitment to home-schooling and their rejection of contemporary culture (a rejection not taken to the extreme of declining an invitation to appear on reality TV). Compare this with the tokenism of "born-again Christian" Harriet Hayes on NBC's dramedy *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*. Harriet's but a cipher, a rhetorical backboard against which ex-boyfriend Matt Albie can thwack his heathen wisecracks.

The competitions and elimination shows are latter-day Milgram experiments that place real people in artificial situations to *see what happens*. *The Apprentice* is Darwinism set loose inside an entrepreneurial Habitrail. Post-9/11, *Survivor* became less a fantasy and more a metaphor for an imagined post-apocalyptic future. What happens on these shows might be a Technicolor version of how we behave in real life, but so is most fiction. Creative endeavors—written, scripted, or produced—should be measured not by how literally they replicate actual life but by how effectively they render emotional truths. The best moments found on reality TV are unscriptable, or beyond the grasp of most scriptwriters. It's no coincidence that 2006's best scripted dramas—*The Wire*, HBO's multi-season epic of inner-city Baltimore; and *Children of Men*, Alfonso Cuarón's futuristic thriller—were studies in meticulously crafted "realness," deploying naturalistic dialogue, decentered and chaotic action,

stutter-step pacing, and a reporter's eye for the telling detail. *The Wire*'s season and Cuarón's movie both ended on semi-resolved novelistic notes, scorning the tendency in current television and cinema toward easy narrative closure. Watching them only threw into higher relief the inability of so much other scripted product to get beyond stock characterizations and pat narrative.

For all the snobbism in the doc community, reality TV has actually contributed to the recent boom in documentary filmmaking. The most successful docs of recent vintage have broken through in part by drawing heavily from reality television's bag of tricks, dropping the form's canonical insistence on pure observation. In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Michael Moore brings an Army recruiter with him to confront legislators and urge them to enlist their children in the Iraq War effort. In *Bowling for Columbine*, Moore takes children who were shot at Columbine to a Kmart, where they ask for a refund on the bullets that are still lodged in their bodies. Of course, Moore's never been a doc purist. *TV Nation*, his short-lived 1994 television series, prefigured a long line of gonzo reality, from *Joe Millionaire* to *Punk'd*. Having the Serbian ambassador sing along to the Barney theme song ("I love you, you love me") while statistics about the number of Bosnians killed during the breakup of Yugoslavia appeared on the screen was not only ur-reality; it was ur-Borat. And speaking of talking animals, *March of the Penguins* turned stunning footage of mating and migrating penguins into an utterly contrived Antarctic version of *Love Story*.

The resistance to reality TV ultimately comes down to snobbery, usually of the generational variety. People under 30, in my experience, tend to embrace this programming; they're happy to be entertained, never mind the purity of conception. As an unapologetic producer of reality shows, I'm obviously biased, but I also know that any genre that provokes such howls of protest is doing something interesting. Try the crab. ▀

Michael Hirschorn last wrote about the Web 2.0 bubble.

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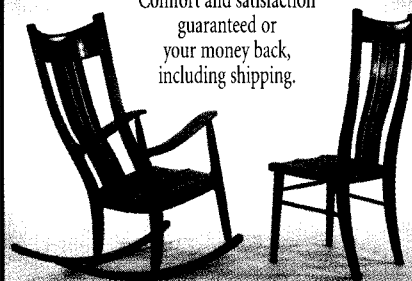
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WORD FUGITIVES



BY BARBARA WALLRAFF

In December a woman who likes to imitate peculiar sounds asked for a word on her husband's behalf—one he could use when she does it in public, to tell her “in very specific terms to stop.” A number of readers found this scenario familiar—who knew? For instance, Mike Castellano, of Washington, D.C., wrote, “Growing up, my brother had the same malady, much to my annoyance on long road trips in the family station wagon. I suggest *Onomatopete's sake!* as an appropriate expression.”

Onomatopoeia-related coinages were popular—among them *imitatopoeia* (from Josh Libresco, of San Rafael, Calif.), *opprobromatopoeia* (Kaitlin Costello and David Greenstein, of Chicago), and *wannamatopoeia* (Dan Schechter, of Los Alamitos, Calif.). Marcia Joyce, of Brooklyn, N.Y., wrote, “To dissuade one from imitating sounds, try *nonomatopoeia*.”

Birds also inspired readers to flights of fancy. Chandler Fulton, of New York City, suggested that the woman had “a case of *mockingbird flu*.” Others diagnosed her ailment as *parrotonitis*; Howard Posner, of Tampa, Fla., suggested that she was *parrotphrasing*. Still other coinages involved mynahs. And Gary Levell, of Kirkland, Wash., wrote, “What's wrong with *Not a peep?*” But the idea that takes top honors makes reference to a different bird that's known as a mimic. Sheila McGrath, of Madison, Wis., wrote, “When she starts to imitate noises, her husband should just address her as *starling*.”

Also sought in December was a word for essential technological skills or knowledge destined to become obsolete. Merlin Camozzi, of Los Angeles, wrote in to question the very premise. “Those of us who grew up with technology,” he wrote,

“know that all well-designed user interfaces share certain basic attributes that transcend specific manufacturers or technologies. We can pick up a new PDA, DVD player, or digital camera and figure out almost immediately how to do what we want to do. I call this ability *techknow*.” Merlin, FYI: You're one of about two readers who took this point of view, as against uncounted numbers who could relate.

Jonathan Barnard, of Asheville, N.C., shared both a word and some advice: “To avoid having to learn *gizmomen-tary* knowledge, just play dumb. Rely



on family members and officemates. Find the ones with overbearing senses of technological mastery and flatter them.” Greg Davies, of Sydney, Australia, wrote, “I suggest *obsolessons*. I suspect this is a concept that has broader application than just outmoded electronics. In my case, this word would also encapsulate 90 percent of my formal schooling, the things I had to learn in my first two careers, and much of what I learned from previous relationships.”

Neandertechnology (Joe Ferraro, of Audubon, Pa.) and *dinolore* (John A. Anderson, of Fort Wayne, Ind.) are delightful coinages that, unfortunately,

miss the mark, because the word requested is for skills that have yet to go extinct. Some readers played around with *expire* and *expertise*, to get the likes of *expiretise*, *expiration data* (John S. Stevens, of Chicago), and *soon-to-be-expertise* (Steve Harrell, of Seattle). Others tinkered with good old-fashioned *know-how*, coining *no-how*, *knew-how* (both from Robert Frenkel, of Sydney, Australia), and *nano-how* (Ben O'Donnell, of Avon, Conn.). Snehlata Champakalakshmi, of New York City, wasn't the only reader to suggest the apt *now-how*, but she was the first—so Champakalakshmi takes top honors.

Now J. BEAMAN, of San Francisco, writes: “Any idea if there's a word for that guy (or girl) who, once he starts dating someone new, abandons all of his friends? I hate that guy.”

And CLELA REED, of Athens, Ga., writes, “I'm looking for a word for that happy feeling of kinship one feels for the driver of a car of the same make and model as one's own. This seems fairly universal and sometimes leads to honks, thumbs-ups, and goofy behavior.”

Send words that meet J. Beaman's or Clela Reed's needs to *Word Fugitives*, The Atlantic Monthly, P.O. Box 67375, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467, or visit the *Word Fugitives* page on our Web site, at www.theatlantic.com/fugitives. Submissions must be received by May 31. Use the same addresses to submit word fugitives that you'd like The Atlantic's help in finding. Letters become the property of *Word Fugitives* and may be edited.

Readers whose queries are published and those whose words are singled out for top honors will each receive, with our thanks, a selection of recent autographed books by Atlantic authors. The next installment's correspondents will be sent *Are We Rome?*, by Cullen Murphy; *On The Wealth of Nations*, by P. J. O'Rourke; and my own *Word Fugitives*.



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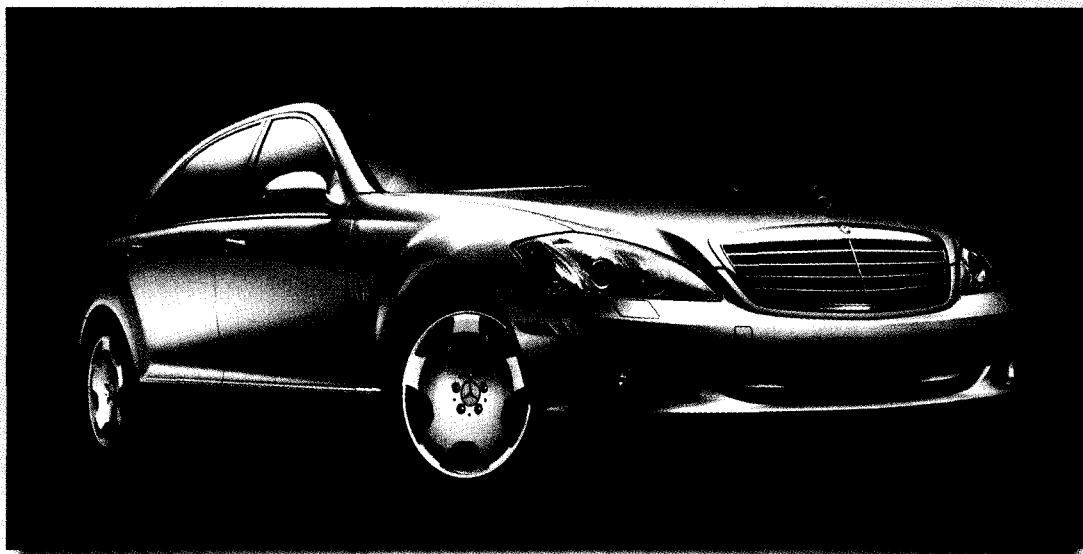
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